

eartrip

issue 3, march 2009

Graham Collier

Improv in Berlin

Reviews

Articles

Criticism



**SOUND JOURNEY:
eartrip compilation no. 1**



**featuring: alexander hawkins, anthony
whiteford, dominic lash, i-c-e, illa
belorukov, skarabee, stet lab, and more**

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the first eartrip

MP3 compilation

album

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By David Grundy.

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A first for the magazine, this MP3 compilation collects pieces by a diverse range of improvising musicians. The performers are: Alexander Hawkins, Anthony Whiteford, David Curington, Dominic Lash, Graham Mackeachen, The Improvising Clarinet Ensemble (I-C-E), Ilia Belorukov, Styles Kaupmann, Skarabee, Stet Lab, and The Cambridge Free Improvisation Society. Performances were recorded in England, Ireland, and Russia.

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The first in a series of data scream-streams, in a grass skirt, with wind chimes and cardigans, in the brain-fried melt of aural honey flowing from an alto sax. If this is Take Five, I strain to believe what Take One could have been like, or if it could even have existed. By Dr Martin Luther Blisset.

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Thanks to a recent profile in The Wire magazine, there's been a resurgence of interest in the work of Ghédalia Tazartès. Well, it may be no more than a sporadic perking up of ears – I'm not sure it's big enough to justify the 'resurgence' tag, and I'm not sure there was ever that much interest in the first place. But at least people are now starting to hear about this musical experimentalist and world unto himself, and so it seems appropriate to give him a more in-depth profile in these pages. By David Grundy

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Berlin, in November of last year, was a 'happening' place for those with an interest in freely improvised music: most notably, it saw the occurrence of the fortieth FMP Total Music Meeting, with additional concerts providing further sights and sounds. But this report refuses to remain simply celebratory: important questions are raised as to strategies, inclusions and exclusions, of a relevance which are both historical and of pressing present concern. By Mark Anthony Whiteford.

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One of the most important, if undervalued of British jazzmen, Collier has produced a body of work which includes class recordings such as 'Song for My Father' and 'Darius'. His work reflects an interest in the visual arts, in the relation between composition and improvisation, and in what he calls the 'jazz continuum' – from the earliest instances of the music to the most 'progressive' tendencies and in between. Interview by David Grundy.

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EDITORIAL

In Memory of Frederick Dewayne Hubbard, 7th April 1938 – 29th December 2008.



Of course the prominent voice of the generation, the leading jazz trumpeter, the plaudit-soaked virtuoso building adventurous hard-bop's nicely wobbling cliff-edge edifice; of course that. But still, what might be the best way to approach the legacy of someone like Freddie Hubbard – the best way in? Listening to 'Some Trees', the 2006 album on hatOLOGY by the group of Daniel Levin/Nate Wooley/Matt Moran/Joe Morris might not seem the most obvious first attempt; but they do cover the titular composition from Eric Dolphy's 'Out to Lunch', on which Hubbard appeared in rather a good light, and in very fine company. (This makes it sound like Dolphy & co. were out for a dinner party, rather

than a manic quick bite round the corner. A fantastic scenario scurries across my brain, in which Dolphy's bass clarinet caught hiccups on the fine wine and Bobby Hutcherson played the wine glasses, while Richard Davis strummed a table leg. Tony Williams on the finest kitchen equipment kept the whole thing bubbling over nicely. What did the customers say? Speechless by speechified yawp-elegance, the dinner reached up beyond gratifying your own desires only to slurp from a different stream of sounds.)

Anyway, Nate Wooley's playing might seem to specifically point up a difference with Hubbard's own. It's more obviously 'out', and harks back past bop's quick-silver cleanness to the earlier 'vulgarity' of a trumpeter like Bubber Miley: full of buzzing rasps and high squeals, it seems shocking precisely because Hubbard's playing seemed so natural to the original – that it fitted so well into the sound of that record. Just as one can't imagine 'Kind of Blue' without Bill Evans or John Coltrane, it is the group that make that record. Or we might even note how Wooley's use of a repeated clarion motto, a low blast followed by an upwards step to a pungent high peak, sounds similar to some of the things that Hubbard was doing on his avant-garde dates in the early and mid 60s.

Hubbard may receive some flak from free jazz fans for not going quite far enough 'out' as he might have done on such dates as Ornette's 'Free Jazz' or Coltrane's 'Ascension', but the fact remains that some of the most progressive musicians of the time found him a fine musician to worth with (and it's not as if label imperatives forced him onto them – these sessions come on different labels, neither of them being Blue Note, the label with which Hubbard was most often associated).

And then there's the 1971 album 'Sing me a Song of Songmy': in itself perhaps not that successful an album, but an indication of the experimentalism of the times, even as Hubbard was about to move towards increased CTI slickness. Yes, the work on 'Songmy' may mostly be that of Turkish composer Ilhan Mimaroglu, who patched everything together (Hubbard's playing is mostly acoustic, accompanied by his current jazz group, and Mimaroglu mixes it in with various electronic treatments, vocal recitations, and orchestral drama). But if the musical experimentation and political thematising (this is often crisis music) aren't so much Hubbard's work – and if they don't always come off – there are moments of intense, stabbing pain and realisation which on their own would be enough to win me over to Hubbard, even if the rest of his career somehow had not happened. 'Monodrama' stabs and slurs the void, the pit of hunger and hopelessness; is drained mourning, mourning for mourning itself, in a world without the promise of a morning sun that does not stain the sky red with its rising tide of blood, does not offer a prospect on landscapes made of corpse-mounds. And then all that voiced up in grave register, Hubbard's ensuing recitation of the anti-Vietnam poem 'Black Soldier': "You, black man, U.S. army private first class: for freedom you shoot down your own freedom. Your body lies crucified on a still cross: the cross has profit and forced labour at each end."

Better an interesting and crushingly wounded failure than something so polished within the terms it has set itself that it ends up saying nothing at all to anyone beyond those who know

exactly what they are looking for: thus the difference in quality between even the later fusion pap and even the earlier work on the CTI record label. ‘Red Clay’, a critical and fan favourite, is a lot less ‘fusiony’ than one might expect – listen to Hubbard and Joe Henderson dig into some serious Coltrane spiritual-type vibes in the intro, then stretch out over the Rhodes and rhythm.

But above all, listen to Hubbard on Herbie Hancock’s ‘Maiden Voyage’ and ‘Empyrean Isles’. Hubbard and Hancock’s artistic paths diverged since that date when so much seemed possible, when Hancock’s conception encompassed both ‘Cantaloupe Island’ and ‘Watermelon Man’ funkiness and the long-form abstraction of ‘The Egg’ or the quick-fire brutality of ‘Eye of the Hurricane’. Hancock is still a respected, Grammy-award winning performer, who’s retained his phenomenal acoustic chops, and sporadically deploys them to fine effect, alongside some of his more questionable fusion moves (‘Rockit’, anyone?); by contrast, Hubbard blew out his lip and arguably made little music of lasting value for at least the past 15 years (despite valiant attempts like ‘New Colors’ from 2001).

This narrative verges on a useless nostalgia, whereby that one moment, or those few moments, in past time, become that which we have now lost and can only think on with wistful regret as we move from past time to pastime: leaving the work we should have done its documentation in a couple of records, deferring what should be our desires and ambitions to those of others to ventriloquize us. Of course there is loss – nostalgia registers that loss in a manner that suggests it could be more than regressive avoidance of the present moment – but such loss is the condition of our living and can’t be made the false idol of our sorrow-worshipping immobility. For then we’d ignore that Hancock’s album sounds in and through and with us still not because it is a product of its time (though of course it is that) but because it is still the burning flame, inner mounting or otherwise, that lights some way.

I hope you’ll get some sense of that flame still burning in the writing and the music written about in this third issue of eartrip. Why not flip the page and find out.

David Grundy

As always, the contact address is dmgrundy@hotmail.co.uk. Pop me a mail if you’re interested in writing for the magazine (please do get in touch!), or have any comments you’d like to make. I should point out that I’ll be leaving university in a few months, so it would be best to send physical things to the following address:

17 Avenue Road
Old Town
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN1 4BZ
(United Kingdom)

Thanks once again to all those who have sent CDs for review; if you don’t see them reviewed in this issue, they are more than likely to be written about in the future.

SOUND JOURNEY: eartrip compilation no. 1

SOUND JOURNEY: eartrip compilation no. 1



featuring: alexander hawkins, anthony whiteford, dominic lash, I-C-E, ilia belorukov, skarabee, stet lab, and more

I'm sure many readers have a fairly substantial collection of free CDs collected from years of magazine subscriptions: some rare and rather exciting in their zany selection of tracks, some containing performances of genuine and lasting worth. Well here's another: the first eartrip compilation album. Of course, as eartrip is internet-based, this makes it a little different from the usual free CD: 'sound journey' is available as an MP3 release rather than a physical object, although artwork and additional information is provided along with the MP3s, so that you can burn your own copy, if you so desire. In any case, rather than a mere supplement or add-on to this issue, I'd like to consider this an integral part of the magazine. The album, and further information, can be downloaded from the following locations:

<http://sharebee.com/69bfac56>; http://www.archive.org/details/sound_journey_146;
<http://www.mediafire.com/download.php?t4ntyzzmgtl>. The track-list is as follows:

- (1) The Cambridge Free Improvisation Society - Michaelhouse (9:22)
- (2) David Curington - Cambridge Improvisation No. 2c (30/1/09) (3:21)
- (3) I-C-E (The Improvising Clarinet Ensemble) - Green Tea and Acid (3:26)
- (4) Skarabee - Ghostly (3:53)
- (5) Graham Mackeachan – ghosts before breakfast (2:18)
- (6) Stet Lab - Has 'It' Happened? (9:44)
- (7) Ilia Belorukov – Alto Sax Improvisation (6:10)
- (8) Dominic Lash - Hatch (5:56)
- (9) Mark Anthony Whiteford – radio breath (10:00)
- (10) Styles J. Kauphmann - acoustic improvisation: solo voice (excerpt) (9:58)
- (11) Alexander Hawkins – Isfahan (9:07)

PAUL DESMOND (Part One)

By Dr Martin Luther Blisset

In The Beginning



It had been an ordinary enough day in Pueblo, Colorado... Paul Desmond lovingly packed his gleaming alto into its brushed velvet case and hurried home to his little white wooden house in the leafy suburb. The late afternoon sun flickered through the pale leaves, dappling the slow moving cab as it drifted along the shady boulevards, leaving behind the downtown dust.

Paul hummed a jaunty 5/4 tune and tapped his foot. His argyle socks twinkled in the afternoon light. 'Honey I'm home' he called, pushing open the screen door to the familiar scent of apple pie & warm puppies...

Kissing each other on the cheek, they gave each other a short resume of their day, before sitting at the kitchen table, Paul, patting the frisky pups and sipping on freshly made coffee. He gazed out of his kitchen windows taking in the trellis and the fruit laden vines. On finishing his coffee, he gathered up the coffee cups from the table and gave them a rinse with a squirt of washing up liquid. "Time for a spot of practise before tea?" he asked. "Sure honey, you go ahead, I was wanting to run the carpet sweeper over the lounge anyway."

For the next half hour their abode was full of the golden sound of Paul's horn, spilling out scales and chords and tricky little runs in 11/4 whilst the sound of the carpet sweeper, followed by the gentle clinking of kitchen dishes and pots and pans played a gentle accompaniment. Paul smiled at the symphony of blissful sounds as he packed his horn away. He remembered a little joke he'd shared with Dave at the rehearsals today. "God, I love that man like a brother," he said to himself.

At first they had seemed an unlikely pair, the gentle altoist and the bombastic Brubeck. For the critics it was a strange musical relationship. Some found Brubeck's playing heavy-handed. Like it said in Downbeat, "Brubeck was oftentimes loud and pounding and seemingly at a loss for melodic ideas..." Paul always felt hurt when he read those kind of comments, and was ill at ease to find his own playing so highly praised by comparison.

"There's certainly nobody else with whom I would have stuck around this long" he mused, moving over to the waikiki-style drinks cabinet to fix a dry Martini... when the telephone let out its ear-shattering ring that seemed to rebound off every shining surface in their immaculate home. He had time for a moment's thought on the contentment he felt sitting in his favourite armchair with a good book and a martini, once all the rehearsals and practise were done.

"Honey, there's a mister Baker on the line for you." "Thanks sweetie," he replied putting his glass down on a cork coaster and making his way in his tartan slippers across the parquet flooring. He hoped to goodness that it wasn't a certain Chet Baker on the line. He'd been hearing a lot about this character listening in on the stories the other musicians told on the road. Cripes, he was glad to be off the touring bus again and back with his wife and the pups.

"hello? Yes this is Paul Desmond," he said into the black handset.

meanwhile in some dreadful basement...

Fuck it! Braxton fumbled with the record player, removed a dustball from the needle and put it back to the start. 'sad eyed lady of the lowlands', over and over again. Christ, the guy was driving me nuts. Like, get over it man.

And all the while he's drawing these crazy diagrams on a sheet of paper. Arrows and zigzags and squiggles. None of it makes any goddamn sense, and he'd drag out his old beatup horn and start playin off of this shit, blats and skronks and trills fit to bust yr eardrum, jesus, and if it ain't Dylan he's playin over and over its Brubeck for godssakes, Paul Desmond's alto solos, worn down so the black plastic's all scuffed and white-lookin'

Paul Desmond, the slowest alto player in the world. I dive back under the bed clothes and run some of those crazy Bird riffs through my head and think about that Lorretta chick I met last night. Jeez, what a doll. That's it, I'll get across town and check her out. She's a ball, that kid. Who the fuck needs sad eyes when you've got Lorretta's breasts to play with.

I pull my jeans on. "See you man." "What? Oh. Yes." Braxton the slowest fuckin mind in the west. Dive out the door just before he gets that horn back into his mouth. Lorretta, you better be ready, cos here I come.

But on the bus there's this old guy all wrapped in a thick checkered duffel coat and cap pulled down so that sprigs of his grey old hair are sticking out like straw and I start to thinking about that old Paul D. Had a mate down south, who knew the old stick in the mud. Next thing I know I'm thinking about what his house must be like and I'm concentrating hard on hating the bourgeois bastard and his goddam hip music for the essentially straight student but I'm not exactly pulling it off. That wife of his sure is pretty, from the pictures I've seen. Maybe I should call up this old acquaintance, get on down there. Christ yeah, I could give that little squirt a piece of my mind for sure.

I start to snooze and rest my head against the cold glass of the bus window, the thrumming of the engine sending a nice vibration through my skull, driving out the endless Dylan moan. Why doesn't he just get the fuck on with it. There's plenty more fish in the sea as my old grandmother would have said. There's that Marilyn chick for starters, causing yet another scene out in the lobby last night with her bang bang bang echoing down the corridors. That crazy broad's gonna get us evicted. I swear I could hear her whimpering and whispering his name everytime she banged on the door.

I crawl out from my nap and go whisper in his ear, "Come on Braxie, let her in. She's not a bad looking girl, and anyways you're all alone now and for chrissakes, she's crazy about you." I don't mention it'd be nice because maybe then he could stop with the fuckin Dylan.

"No" he says, "she ought to stay away. It's all such a mess. I'm lost here. She's best off out of it." He sure as hell sounds very lost, looking down at his graphs and equations of so-called music.

Eventually she goes. I wake up. Missed my stop.

Braxton prods another plug of herbal tobacco down into the bell of his pipe and fires up, reclining back into the folds of the ratty armchair, stretching his legs, ploughing up the layers of takeaway cartons and biscuit wrappers that surround him. Plumes of blue smoke drift through filtered sunlight. Camera-obscura of dustsheet curtains.

It's no good. Up again and pacing the room. Fractals and parabolic curves, chevrons of vermillion joined to dotted green circles, PURE ALGEBRA crashing through his mind. Liminal sluice-gates burst wide, floods of symbols racing faster than Sonny Stitt's flashing fingers.

Jeez, it's not even his apartment, that brooding sonofabitch been crashing here for six months now and don't look any nearer leaving than when he first arrived

i stayed on the the bus, giving the driver my hammiest 'i'm a hippy doing a trip so don't disturb me' act, which worked. these straitniks don't like getting involved with anybody that's tripping. even the fuzz won't take you in if you're tripping. best thing is to tell em you're jesus or something. the driver's looking relieved as he pulls into the bus station. he's looking out at the fellow drones all dressed up in the same nazi outfits.

ok i'm out of here, going down south, gonna check out mr and mrs desmond. at the ticket line i fish around in the junk in my jacket and there it is- the screwed up piece of paper with thier number on it. jeez it'll be good to get outta town again. get me a tan. sort this friggin desmond fella out. meet the missus. swell vacation, this'll be for sure.

nodding off on the bus, i got to thinking about all these cool young guys, chet baker, gerry mulligan and that crazy young brubeck cat. they were all pretty hip to the trip and yet they were lined up round the block waiting for an opportunity to play with this old grandad desmond, or even just catch a whisper from his horn. i mean this old straitnik's gotta be 70 if he's a day. christ he's even on those old kid ory records, he's been around so long. it was a long goddam ride.

"hi, mrs desmond? my name's raul. i phoned earlier. yeah thanks for seeing me at such short notice." "why, of course not, it's nothing young man. please, come in. i'm afraid mr desmond isn't in, but please, please, yes. can i make you a drink? coffee or tea maybe?" tea for chrissakes. i'm checking out this doll's ass, not bad for an older dame. what is is this desmond's got that they all go for?

The Troublesome Telephone Call

Later, in plaid dressing gown and carpet slippers, Paul gazed fondly for a moment at his sleeping wife, and with held breath tiptoed past the basket of softly snoring puppies, careful to avoid the creaking floorboard.

In the kitchenette Paul quietly fixed a midnight snack of warm milk and chocolate cookies, and, careful not to spill on the pristine parquet floor, eased open the cellar door and crept down the wooden stair to the den. Here he'd be able to think about that disturbing telephone call...

Chet Baker, the hollow eyed golden boy, the hep chick's jazzmag pin-up, and as everyone in the business knew, a dangerous cat to know. The row of silvery downbeat poll-winners awards glimmered in the light of the reading lamp, giving off a soft reassuring glow. "Gee, I mean, I like his playing, the silken cobweb tone of his trumpet, and I admire artistry wherever it's concerned with truth and beauty, ...it's just I have such a bad feeling about this Baker fellow".

A pattering sound, punctuated by almost imperceptible bumping and ticking, grew slowly louder, followed by rapid whimpering and scratching, and the door creaked open. "Atta-boy Spot," Paul patted the couch beside him and the runt dachshund pup padded over to his masters slippers foot, snuffled his ankle with a wet nose. "You know, Spot, sometimes I get the feeling that there are orgies going on all over New York City, and somebody says, 'Let's call Desmond,' and somebody else says, 'Why bother? He's probably home reading the Encyclopedia Britannica."

Archive Transcription:

...Chet baker was a mess for part of his life. But his cheeks were already sunken even before the heroin kicked in, which all the girls and boys found attractive, so it's understandable if he chose to take drugs & accentuate the look.

Long afternoons he would spend at Paul Desmond's house sipping English tea and pleading with paul to talk to Gerry and ask him to let Chet back in the band. and Paul forbade him to use the loo because his wife would not tolerate the blood splats from him injecting himself in there. Indeed it was during these afternoons that Chet manipulated the innocent and open mind of Paul Desmond.

"Excuse me Chet, but i must get on with my practice now" Paul would say, and then set to with his scales and odd time-signature exercises. His wife would uncharacteristically stick her head round the door: 'Everything alright dear? she'd ask whilst checking the corners of the room, "and did that nice Mr Baker leave?"

Then she would go look out the kitchen window and open it and listen for maybe a strange bird or something that might explain the chirping she could have sworn she'd heard coming from the practice room.

Within a few weeks Paul had fallen out with Dave Brubeck, having begun making uncharacteristically caustic remarks at rehearsals, saying things like "what the heck is the ongoing obsession with 5, 7, 11-four time? What the hell's wrong with four-four or a good ol' waltz?

Pretty soon he was cutting rehearsals altogether, taking the train to Pittsburgh and frequenting a small Cocktail bar with a jazz pianist playing pretty standards and earning a comfortable living at it.

After a few weeks of being unsettled by the man in the cardigan who now sat at the front of the seating area, the pianist found she was losing her concentration, & could not find her singing voice in the formerly comfortable way she had. On his last visit he slipped a note onto the piano lid as he left. She read the note between playing 'My Funny Valentine' and 'Autumn Leaves'. The creased and greasy paper contained an endless system of peculiar chord sequences and runs of notes, all of which kept jumping into her mind as she tried to play 'Autumn Leaves'

That night at home, at 3.30 in the morning she played the sequence straight off the paper and didn't stop until 7.30, at which point she collapsed upon her dusty wooden floorboards in tears. From this point on, all notation wavered before her vision & took on the form of algebraic equations. By the end of that same month the customers at the Cocktail bar were jeering at her and complaining to the Management, who were forced to take her to one side one evening, halfway through her usual set. "I'm afraid we're going to have to let you go, Marilyn. I mean, I love you babe, but, you know, I gotta make a living here".

The Green Weed Like Angel Hair In The Silver Water

"Fish ain't biting, Paul..." Stooping under willows, legs and arms too long for his crumpled tweeds, Brubeck begins to dismantle his fishing pole. A burr of bindweed clings to his mustard-colored plus-fours. Size twelve brogues trampling the coarse grasses as he heads up the bank towards the car. He pauses, turns back. "Listen Paul, I'd like you to reconsider... I've been talking to the guys and they agree, we can't do it without you - I mean I could always go out with the trio, back to playing the cocktail joints and burlesques, but hey, what-say we get rid of Morello, dump the time signature stuff like you say.. I've got this idea for a kinda Vegas-themed album, music to play the slots by, maybe take it in a more.. I dunno, Avant Garde kinda direction even.."

grasping at straws Brubeck makes an involuntary grimace.

"Oh heck Dave, it's just that this cool jazz schtick is so old hat, not even the frat guys and jocks dig it anymore. The college circuit is dead... & Vegas sounds like a bad idea... Black Power's the thing now, Freedom with a capital **F**, that's what the kids want. It's time for me to be moving on..."

Dave had packed such a nice picnic lunch and had had high hopes for the day. It would be like the old days, Paul and Dave and Eugene and Joe in the old Mustang, travelling from gig to gig, neat sports jackets and shades, drums and bass strapped to the roof rack, flecks of amber straw in the hot afternoon air, driving between fields of corn, tooting the horn at the chicks as they drove into town.

And now look at them: Eugene Wright strung out on corn liquor, Morello a fucking maniac guzzling benzedrine to play longer and more and more complex solos. Brubeck lost in gloom watching his world fall apart, so dependant on Desmond's alto...

He'd packed Paul's favourite cucumber sandwiches and a flask of English tea, Graham crackers and pastrami, and ...

This was HELL. It wasn't working. Paul Desmond could be as stubborn as a mule.

!!!

"Don't you know who I am. I AM DAVE BRUBECK AND I STUDIED WITH DARIUS FUCKING MILHAUD, GODDAMMIT. NOW, I WANT TO SEE THE MANAGER!!!"

"I'm sorry, Sir, but your name's not down here, and Mister Desmond has made it expressly clear..." The rain saturated Brubeck's hat and started to trickle down his grimacing face. "What the fuck is this all about Moreno?" He took in the streets, the down and outs huddled in the abandoned shop doorway opposite, one of them with a needle hanging out of his arm. The light from the car headlamps bounced off the wet tarmac and seared straight into the centre of his headache. The tail lights and indicators lit up the gutters. "Walk don't fucking walk," he cursed. "You what boss?" Moreno shrugged. He was soaking wet too and would sooner be eyeing up the women from some stage, playing with the band they had, instead of pursuing this crazy little alto player. "Where is this hell?" Brubeck swept his arm upwards at the graffiti painted sign above the club doorway. "Klub Musika Sic." Well it sure is sick alright.

He winced again as he heard the screeching noises emanating from the club doors. He couldn't believe this was the sound of that lovely old alto saxophone. "Might just as well be somebody screaming down a sewerage pipe," he cussed. He pictured his old buddy standing in that ridiculous grass skirt under the infamous banner that stretched above his stage, "Women and Black men only."

"So which one are you old pal?"

He turned to Moreno who was leching over the women leaning into the crawling car windows, their blouses translucent in the rain.

"Moreno, let's go eat. I think I have a plan."

"Sure boss, we don't need to take five on that plan. Har har."

Sound filtered out into street:

Paul Desmond blew on his milk-white horn
on his milk-white horn blew he
and every note he sung stung old brubump there
as it crashed on his ears & his eyes filled with tears
and his shoulders slumped

and his plaid coat humped & he wished he could be free of the whole darn business..

but that Las Vegas date was looming, 'Jackpot', the concept album, and here he was with no band "just this banjo player and me i guess, but, shit on it man, that's where the music started, with those old banjos and tubas and the real music of the people." He reached down and picked up the bamboo chimes from the floor between his feet. A moments hesitation. A sudden flashback to the old days and the dancing-in-the-seats students. "No man, this is the music now. The only music." He caught sight of his nobby knees and hairy legs protruding from his grass skirt and doubted again. But as he lifted the chimes, releasing the free fall of stuttering clatter he regained his resolve. In his jacket pocket he had the notes that Brubeck kept leaving eith the doorman. He straightened his tie and jangled the chimes. The banjo player skrealed his sound through the marshall amps.

mimosa blossoms fell from the trees as brubeck trudged from the limo to his door. this all means nothing. the house, the cars, the leggy dames in every city. brubeck SOUR OLD GUYS IN SPANGLED JACKETS, HAS-BEENS GONE BACK TO THE BARS, trying to put a false-teeth grin on it, the cheese & glamour of the gaming houses vegas-style... playing quiet while the coins jangle, while the wheels rattle round. bone teeth dead eyes dice on green felt... eyes turned inward, all the women on someother guy's arm. 'JACKPOT 'for godssakes... add a couple of exclamation marks to that. brubeck mansion on the hill... decor: scottish-baronial after the fifties fashion, but now its 1966. everything moves on, everyone moves on. flash your teeth for the tourists, mirror-ball, star-spangled rictus. go back & play the hits, or the hit rather, thaths all they want to hear... 'honey, i'm home'. dave called up the stairs...'christ, i'm turning into paul desmond' he thought, '.. and desmond's turned into a monster.... now, where's my cocoa?'

REVIEW FROM 'downbeat' 27 July, 1967:

"The New Paul Desmond Trio opened Tuseday at the famed Blackhawk Nitespot, San Francisco, to an ecstatic reception from what is by jazz terms a new & younger audience. The 'Hippies' were out in force to rattle their beads and gyrate in the fumes of incense. It's the new Desmond these kids 'dig', dad. The one time prince of cool has turned up the heat and gone psychedelic, along with his all-new rhythm section featuring new faces Norris Jones on the bass and Milford Graves occupying the drum chair.

Together, they realize a trio of dynamics in human proportions. Nothing is constructed or certain, nothing is deliberate or denied. Form, an area of agreement however tacit, is once again the extension of content. In consort, point equals counterpoint. The key is that they need not adjust. There is no room for reconciliation; each event creates its own identity, its own space. Activity invents understanding, meaning: clear, dry polyphony is a transparent argument - vibrant, messy, serene - Everything is melody. Everything is in order.

I feel the trio is an excellent example of a post-nuclear, tri-metric unit that demonstrates stable logic information, mutable logic information, and synthesis logic information in one time-space, where there is one individual having extended open improvisation and in that same space there is a logic containing three musicians working together - maybe in a pulse-track or whatever - and at the same time a stable logic component involving totally notated music. All these kind of interrelated partials now operate freely in the trio, to create another context for experiencing and exploration... structures that satisfy the urgency of the moment."

Braxton Muses...

"I was going to say that I was deeply indebted to Stockhausen but I changed my mind. I changed my mind because I am sitting on this desk trying to think of valid ideas to write on the back of a record but the whole scene is a drag ... right now my leg is itching but I am not afraid ... anyway I had planned to write about the different approaches to the music on this record but I feel so ridiculous because it's so stupid to try and explain anything especially since you don't know where it is anyway that even as Lynn types this I become more and more frustrated and yet I do want the money for writing liner notes so I must continue, especially since I've already been paid.

"This is a very nice room that I'm in right now but since I've decided not to mention Lynn's name I'll merely confine my remarks to the scenery as such (whatever that means), If this record doesn't sell a million copies I will be very disappointed. Already I am making room on my mantle for a gold record and I am going to have parties and I am preparing an acceptance speech.

"About my saxophone, I've had Lucy for six years and while she has been repaired several times I love her very much (until I can get some money to get her traded in) I am really surprised about that

Dear John letter ... I mean there must be other ways.

" I just wish I could get to write a few more reviews for Downbeat... besides you get to hear the bands for free.."

" Besides, nobody's using pianos in the rhythm section these days."

"How'd it go, Hon?" - Lauretta never went to the gigs, she hated nightclubs, all that smoke and noise, all the drunks and showgirls or whatever you'd call them... but that wasn't Paul's familiar footstep on the stairs... the scent of patchouli, and something else sharp and feral, a figure in silhouette in the doorway...

"Oh, Mister Vaneigem, what on earth are you doing back here?"

"Hey, call me Raoul baby, it's not like we're strangers, huh?"

he dreams of leaves...

- F7 Bb7 F7 F7
- Bb7 Bb7 F7 D7
- Gm7 C7 F7 F7
- blue monk yeah, but he's playin' it in the two whole-tone scales
- 'MUNK?? Whut is this MUNK bizniss??'
- Fuck, who is this guy, this fucken Vaneigem, with his scary black notebooks all full of coffee stains, sitting in the front row. No relation I hope to that fuckin Ken Vandereigemark, the paul whiteman white-man of jazz? Another fucking VAMPIRE.
- Anyway, I'm not thinking about Vaneigem right now, I'm lookin' at the spectacle that's going on onstage.
- This solo's been going on for about 45 minutes now, everyone's either nodding out over their untouched drinks or split & caught a cab; the old janitor's lurking with his mop & bucket, tinkling up the broken glasses, swabbing at the sticky bar-top. The few that are left are sweating & swaying like in ghost trance, mostly chicks i gotta say - mesmerised by the way he gets dirty sounds outta that ax, the way it curves up in a suggestive arc from his belly.
- Flashing thru my head, WHOA haul up bud, this is fucken PAUL DESMOND here on the stage, though you couldn't tell from the publicity 8 x 12's tacked to the billboard outside. This guy's got long sweat-drenched shaggy locks, combed sideways over his shiny dome, ratty beard, grass-skirt swooshing in the black light, & shells and beads rattling on his bony chest.
- Ghost Trance Music hmmm.
- rattles and bells and the light of the sun
- Paul Desmond dreams of golden leaves falling through splintered sunlight, eyes turning upwards and inwards behind closed lids ...

paul desmond waits

he waits in his motel bedroom with all the mail he's collected from his mailbox. messages full of love and missing him and won't he come back and cant we talk this over. "to me this all sounds like the crappiest soul music ever written," he says to the woman in his bed. "every word logically follows the previous one, just like the notes in a friggin brubeck solo. if these people really care about love and communication each word would be a word at random, a note from the spectrum of infinity played on a piece of hollowed bamboo; that's the only truth."

"yeah sure baby, what ever you say," says the woman from under the covers, " you finished with that bottle, only it's been a little vertical for a bit of a long time, you ask me." he wondered how his wife was and guessed the pups must be growing big without him. "get the fuck out of the bed now. get down on your fuckin knees." he rammed it to her thinking of the little fellows as they used to slide around on the parquet floor. as he came he tasted warm horlicks in his throat."what would she be doing now?"

"who baby?"

he thought of his wife.

she was entertaining this strange new visitor as best she could. But she was very unsure of her footing lately, what with Paul being away so much and life being so utterly changed. This visit was another manisfestation of the challenges she was facing. "Well I'm really not sure when Mr Desmond might return." Tears swelled in her eyes which had a direct affect on Raoul's groin area."He's, my husband's been rather erratic in his habits of late."

"what am i doing in this place?" he asked himself looking at the threadbare carpet he'd pulled out of a skip and brought back to this abandoned signal box which was now his home.

" i am seeking the soul of the new music and i must never give up." he began again hack sawing

lengths of the bamboo sticks he'd found on the beach. he picked up the saxophone which, amazingly, no one had stolen despite the fact that he had no lock on the door. he clicked it into place on his saxophone sling, which he never removed any more. Forty five minutes he still stood with his embouchure closed around the mouthpiece, having blown not one sound, entranced by the tinkle of the tiny wind chime that was dangling from the bell of his horn. he cackled to himself, " yes, yes, the music of the fuckin spheres."

!BEWARE OF FLASHBACKS, DREAM SEQUENCES and VISIONS!

i think its time to set the goldfish free..

braxton looked around the room. it was time to be leaving. dust on the skirting, bottles piled up between the bed and the dresser. ankle deep in candy bar wrappers, jamjars of pipe tobacco ashes, dust, debris, manuscript shreds like dandruff. somewhere under there a layer of split reeds, splintered floorboards, spilt drinks, spores of old alto spit.

quickly riffling thru the laundry pile for a re-wearable cardigan. cool, this one's not too mouldy. what's on there will brush off. autumn day. this calls for patched corduroy jacket. okay, not so bad, crumpled maybe, and blotched with ink but what the hell. everything else is scooped into a hastily repaired duffel bag.

i'm gonna be late for marilyn ... braxton squirrels away the following items in the moth-eaten pockets of his tan cotton corduroy leisure jacket: briar pipe, wad of coltsfoot herbal tobacco, fountain pen, a length of string, compass, some barley-sugars, afro-comb, a selection of different sized small leather-bound notebooks, and, in a moment of forlorn hope's fancy, one old and battered-looking foil-wrapped rubber (long past its use-by date). carefully he counted out the back-rent he owed & stuffed it in an envelope taped to the ice-box door where raoul would maybe find it if he wasn't too stoned.

'bye babies', braxton tilts the fishbowl into the toilet & flushes, saying a tiny silent prayer. then out thru the screen door, lucy in her case slung across his back bumping off the lumpy duffel bag. braxton stepping out just like bob dylan on the cover of his second album (the freewheelin' bob dylan, columbia cl1986, released may 27, 1963) the one where he has the girl on his arm...

(To be Continued)

ANSWERED INSTANTLY

"Play a sound/ with the certainty/ that you have an infinite amount of time and space"
(Karlheinz Stockhausen – UNBEGRENZT, 'Aus den sieben Tagen')

In that instant

you

are.

being wise for shameful momentary surrender.

not looking on but in.

think one way of making life still exist, not suspended as you play.

being the moment and in it and with it.

forced the silence to breathe, the earth to slender surrender through the pause.

not coercion in the moment.

on the high-hoping land there is no space for looking back, forward that's forgotten, in this space.

not that pre-supposed carnival, whipped up desire and for it:

the little touch inside brings out your self and it

dissipates. anticipate

corollary based on the felt, unproven.

the felt is smooth to the touch. it touches the air

around, someone's heart is moved. the joined sens-

itivities, the rumble of an earth moving, trembling in the base and root.

shattering

in microscopic existence the utter being,

and then:

reality (in situ) as possibility, as those planes

out-flowing, the connection

out

only deductions, reason as it occurs, partaken as essences of existence

like when yr hair stands up

in for the quivering mass of particles that,

at that moment, you feel yourself to be

that they never can bottle up or take away and sell

back to you, in disguised form;

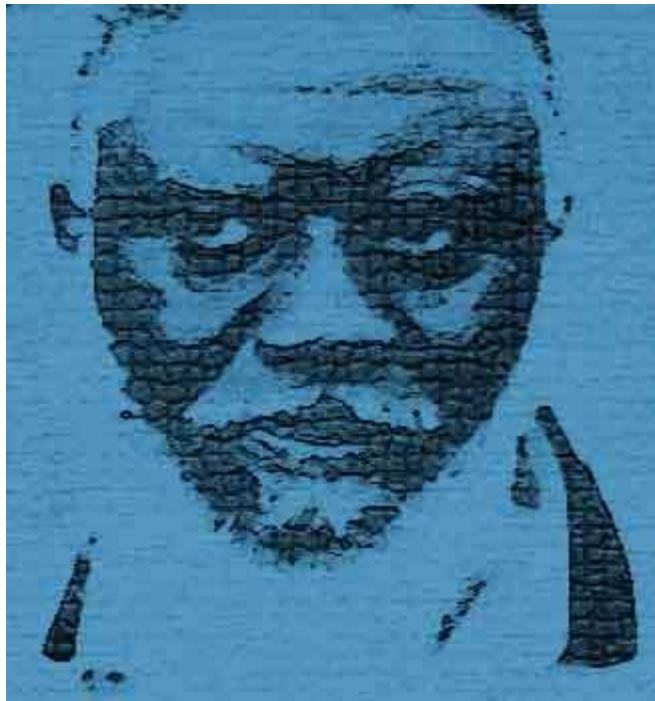
is this the mess

ages won't obscure.

(David Grundy)

THOUGHTS ON PHARAOH SANDERS' *TAUHID*

By David Grundy



A/ The Evolution of Pharaoh

"What...even those resistant to the new jazz...cannot escape is the emotional energy in the new music. By contrast, nearly every jazz breakthrough in the past has been challenged as being too 'intellectual', too 'European', not 'hot' enough. These days, the opponents of what's happening now seem to be charging that too much emotion is erupting in this music. And that is exploding without form. But too much emotion for whom? And what are the notions of form?"

Nat Hentoff, liner notes to 'Tauhid'

This is not 'Pharoah's First' - that's a strange album on ESP disk, with Mr Sanders trying to uproot himself from a conventional rhythm section, making them sound leaden as he tries to blaze apart their jazz preconceptions - but I guess you could consider it his debut proper, marking a continuation of the work with Coltrane, but, perhaps more importantly, a departure into his own way of expressing a spiritual quest (indeed, of enacting it through music). It's important to note that this was actually recorded in 1966, when Sanders was still working with Coltrane, but I think the point still stands.

Over time, it would become more and more obvious that there was less of a sense of struggle, of 'working through' in Sanders' music, than in his mentor's - it was as if he took a step back from the brink on which Coltrane was constantly teetering, instead choosing to locate himself a little further from the edge, with brief forays back to that edge that were conducted almost in nostalgic reminiscence. Though I realize this does injustice to Pharoah's undoubted and utter sincerity, one has to wonder at the musical gap between 'Live in Japan' (1966) and 'Love will Find a Way' (1978). In just over ten years Pharoah's preoccupations have switched from emotion stretched to the limit, outside the confines of traditional modes of jazz expression (or indeed, of almost any pre-existing mode of musical expression at all), to a more easily pre-packaged emotionalism that exists within the admittedly pleasant strictures of 'smooth' strings, finger-popping electric basslines, and creamy backing vocals. His saxophone sound is still undoubtedly there - it's not as if he lost his voice (shouted himself hoarse?!) in whatever process occurred in that 12-year period - but it's been reduced in impact. There's less overblowing, and when it does come, it's as an unambiguously joyful sound without the history of struggle behind it that would make it resonate so much more. This reduction of the personal touch at the same

time causes the voice to lose its universality, its appeal to the primal instincts, the very roots of human emotional perception and response/ responsiveness to sound.

But at the time 'Tauhid' was released, no one was to know that in ten years they'd be hearing Pharoah playing what essentially amounts to a slightly classier variant of smooth jazz (OK, they didn't really know what smooth jazz was at all - I suppose the nearest equivalent would be Bobby Hackett's 'muzak' of the 1950s, though that was probably a little more of a niche market than smooth jazz would turn out to be). Pharoah had his reputation (or infamy) as being probably the most 'out there' it got - along with Ayler, let's say, though his own music had been noticeably toned down in those last few years, through collaborations with Mary Maria and Cal Cobbs.

Yet on 'Tauhid' the 'young lion' proved to be, if not quite a vegetarian, less of the marauding predator pulling chunks off jazz's fleshy carcass than might have been expected. In the liner notes, Nat Hentoff stresses the lyricism of what he calls the 'New Jazz', which had previously been far less prominent in Sanders' work (the searching solo that follow Coltrane on 'Peace on Earth' or the Village Vanguard 'Naima' are in marked contrast to Coltrane's own relative calm in stating the melodies, and, notably, Sanders does not play on 'Serenity' from 'Meditations'). While Hentoff puts it that Sanders' range was "continually expanding" (with the increased lyricism presumably evidence of this), in hindsight we can see that this expansion eventually turned into limitation - the interest in beautiful, singable melodies and in African and Indian percussion and instrumentation ended up being little more than an exotic colouring for the comfort of repeating chord alternations, to which the solos on top sometimes seemed even to be subordinated.

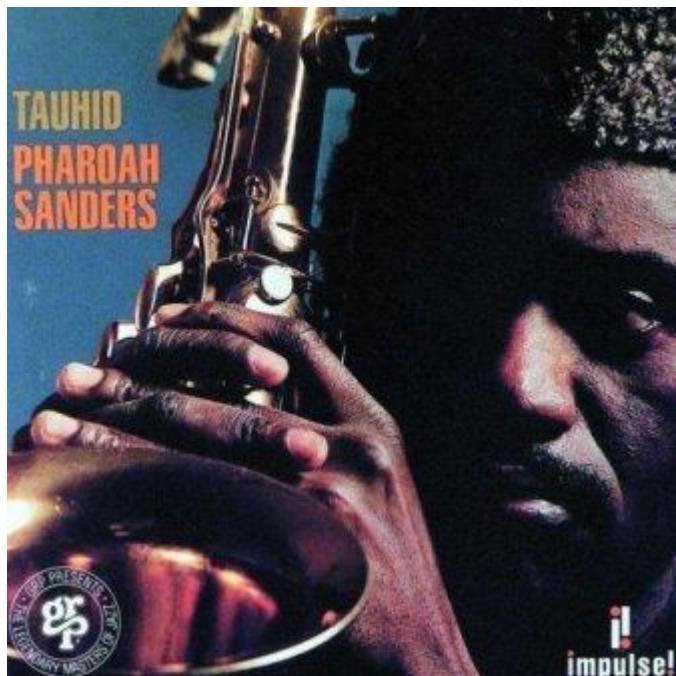
Lyricism in 'Tauhid', then: a reviewer on Amazon.com describes the music as "otherworldly but familiar", and notes the paradoxical mixture of the harsh and the gentle for what is ultimately a serene effect. I'd argue that, while things may remain in the realms of paradox here, as Sanders' work became more groove-based, the fearsome overblowing ended up becoming almost (almost) a trick effect with which to spice up otherwise mellow grooves - that complex mixing of emotions, the refusal to be defined, indeed, by terms such as 'harsh' and 'gentle', abandoned for more conventional and repetitive structures and harmonies. It's hard to draw a line marking where exactly this happened – and I do still have a great affection even for Sanders' 'easier' work – but the enjoyment I get from listening to the albums shouldn't blind me to the fact that much of Sanders' work is seriously flawed.

How can this be? If you, the listener, enjoy the music, if it has an effect on you, that should surely be the judge, rather than by some false 'objective standard' of 'musical quality' – right? Well, as you can see, I can formulate my own counter-arguments to what I've just said, and this sort of line of reasoning often comes up when discussing free jazz. But I must admit that, despite the elation and peace I feel when listening to Pharoah on !Impulse!, there is always a slight feeling of disquiet there too - the suspicion that the music **encourages** one to switch off, to let it 'wash over' one as generalized vibe rather than as body-mind engagement / experience - and this is a long way from the **enhanced** consciousness offered by free jazz.

Maybe it's a question of 'Balance', to take the title of one of Sanders' compositions: you have to take the good with the bad, the rough with the smooth. Thus, 'The Creator has a Master Plan' ends up repeating itself, as does 'Hum-Allah', while 'Iziphlo Zam' is a little episodic, but 'Live at the East' makes effective use of vocals and 'Enlightenment' is an infectious listen. 'Black Unity' is over-long, but the front-line of Sanders, Gary Bartz and Carlos Garnett ensures a degree of friction, and the double bass-line is indeed hypnotic; the title track of 'Summun Bukmun Umyun' is another so-so African-tinged groover with free patches, but the following 'Let us Go Into the House of the Lord' is genuinely inspired, with some absolutely sublime playing from Cecil McBee (who's turning into one of my favourite bassists at the moment). Let's put that bad/good formulation the other way other way round: while 'To John' on the rare, Japan-only 'Love in Us All' contains some of the most effective 'fire music' Sanders' recorded under his own name (genuine free jazz rather than the hybrid styles he tended to play in at this period), 'Love is Everywhere' takes a small idea, attractive enough in itself, and stretches it to ridiculous lengths. There's only so much chugging piano, willowy soprano sax, and sing-a-long vocals I can take. So, Sanders' legacy is one I have a complex relation to; while I listen to his music a lot (more so

than Coltrane these days, though that doesn't mean I think he's 'better' than Trane at all), I still find it very problematic.

B/ TAUHID



- **Pharoah Sanders** – alto and tenor sax, piccolo, voice
- **Sonny Sharrock** – guitar
- **Dave Burrell** – piano
- **Henry Grimes** – bass
- **Roger Blank** – drums
- **Nat Bettis** – percussion

*Recorded at the Van Gelder Studio,
Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey,
15th November 1966.*

(1) 'Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt'

The album opens with a collective meditation. Tympani(?), cymbal smashes, Sharrock's new approach to post-Coltrane ballad guitar, twangy and shuddering, Burrell as chordal colourist - a group *sound* and *feel*, not the soloist as free individual striving to be the lone voice of truth (this sort of collectivism is perhaps what people disliked so much about late Coltrane - the ensemble passages on 'Ascension', the infamous Philharmonic Hall concert where people expected to see the 'Classic Quartet' and instead got an 11-piece group with the Ayler Brothers, Pharoah, Alice, etc).

A brief Henry Grimes bass solo - again concerned with textures and sounds, with the bass's properties as means of producing sound, with timbre and quality, with woozy arco rather than the melodic, horn-like role of La Faro or Gomez with Bill Evans.

Now Sanders enters for the first time. His delayed entry could be said to either downplay or enhance the individual leader role I hinted at in the first paragraph: by waiting so long, his entry becomes more expected ("this album is under his name - where is he?"), more hoped for, perhaps - but at the same time the delay is a way of saying "you don't *need* to hear me straightaway - these other guys are important too." Playing piccolo, rather than sax, he vocalizes through the instrument while playing, as he does on 'To Be', the flute/piccolo duet with Coltrane on 'Expression'. An 'exotic' and still striking sound, it could have become a novelty effect if Sanders had chosen to over-deploy it, but this and 'To Be' are the only recorded instances, I think. Needless to say, its effect is a little different to Roland Kirk's use of similar techniques...

Drum ritual, low-toned. Almost nine minutes in, and Grimes is about to solo again - no, instead he locks in and begins to build the famous groove that will underpin the rest of the track (I guess we've reached 'Lower Egypt'). In the 'pre-amble', I hinted at the role this emphasis on the groove played in the diminishing quality of Sanders' music, but this particular groove, as they say, still 'does it for me' every time. In itself, with the emphasis on rhythm (the players' truly functioning as 'rhythm section' here!), this could be seen as part of the 'back to Africa' movement - although (I speak from a position of relative ignorance), with a simplified, totalizing effect that downplays the complexities of actual African tribal music (to me, 'Bailophone Dance' on 'Thembi' sounds more 'authentic', and certainly freer). Still, Nat Bettis, from the little I managed to find it via an internet search, was an ethnomusicologist, so presumably he wouldn't have been

happy slotting in to provide a merely facile sense of exotic colouring.

And *Pharoah's solo*, though brief, has such impact. For reasons of context perhaps: it's the first time he's let rip on sax, indeed, the first time we've heard him play sax at all on the album. Once again, the employment of the delaying/ waiting tactic - "that groove's been going on for *three minutes* now - what the hell is going on?" You're about to find out - Pharoah, first, echoing the groove line, three times playing the riff, then some repeated figure, now a note, first clean, now overblown - then, suddenly, WHAAARGH! WHAAARGH! WHAAARGH! I find it hard to restrain a physical reaction to those overblown whorfs of sound when I hear them. They seem so inevitable, so right - so truly the sound of a man as himself, as one with his instrument, as looking at his true centre, his true self. From the liner notes, his quotes resonate: "I don't really see the horn anymore. I'm trying to see myself. And similarly, as to the sounds I get, it's not that I'm trying to scream on my horn, I'm just trying to put all my feelings into the horn. And when you do that, the notes go away [...] Why [do] I want clusters [of notes]? So that I [can] get more feeling, more of me, into every note I play. You see, everything you do has to *mean* something, has to be more than just notes. That's behind everything I do - trying to get more ways of getting feeling out."

The subdued vocals that follow, might be a little underwhelming on their own, but are perhaps a necessary coming down, back to earth, back to the groove, to melody, after that solo.

(2) 'Japan'

At just over three minutes, this is quite clearly an 'interlude' between the two long tracks that bookend it. Chugging bells and a stately promenade beat, Grimes mixing things up a little by alternating affirmative on-the-beat plucks with melodic counterpoint that goes in a slightly different direction. Sanders then sings the melody a few times, Grimes takes what I suppose one might call a short solo, then it ends. It's really all about the melody though, which could strike one as gorgeous and elegant, though to me it's always seemed a little twee, a Hollywoodized idea of Japan rather than the deeper engagement with world musics that Hentoff's liners claim for it.

Sanders' vocal shows him embracing not the need to be 'correct' or 'traditional' (though he claims he was trying to impersonate an amalgamation of various different singers), but to be *yourself*. Certainly a different way of doing that to the 'Lower Egypt' solo, and few will argue that it's as successful, but it has a pleasing, unaffected simplicity about it. From this track, one could say that Burrell and Sharrock are rather under-used on the record - or that this is just part of the collective conception. Certainly, Grimes is the most prominent solo voice after Sanders, which is somewhat unusual. Pretty much impossible to tell what Burrell's personal voice is from 'Tauhid' (Sharrock has it easier because no one else played the guitar like him, so, even if it's just a few seconds' space he gets, you're going to know it's him!)

(3) (A) 'Aum'

Pharoah had been here before, participating in Coltrane's 'OM' from 1965 (about which, see 'Circling Om', Simon Weill's superb article, available on the All About Jazz website). Things aren't nearly as terrifying here, though this is probably the freest section of the album. Lick-spit-riddling cymbals and hit-hat keep the sound tight, Grimes' immediately perplexing it with fast free walking, Burrell adds boxy ominous chords, then Sanders comes in, scribbling away on alto while Roger Blank switches to the more forceful toms. Off-mike for a moment, we might suppose Pharoah to be in an eye-closed calisthenics of ecstasy; he roils up and down, his tone vocal and gruff (though not as powerful as on tenor). Sawing, see-sawing up and down in motions that lead to a *strain* for volume and air, at the end, of those long notes held before the next darting rally. Highest in the mix behind the sax are the drums - the recording isn't great (they really should release a new mix of the album), but your ear can just about pick up Sonny Sharrock raging behind the Pharoah. Imagine the sonic experience if this had been better recorded! These guys truly had power behind their sound, it was *frightening* to the jazz establishment, to the critics, the guardians of 'good taste' and Jim Crow 'get in line Nigger' custodianship of a music they didn't really understand.

(B) 'Venus'

Sounds like they suddenly turned Sharrock up in the mix because they thought he was going to solo - as it is, Pharoah comes back in almost immediately, on tenor, but we do get to hear a precious few seconds of that guitar squall. Sanders' tone just **radiates** spirituality - later on, perhaps he traded on that a bit too much (by playing even just melodies he could convince), but here the utter sincerity is captivating, the vitality of being and the living of life in sound. Shakers and cymbals, strummed repeated bass notes and finally piano runs that prefigure Lonnie Liston Smith's harp-like arpeggios on 'Hum-Allah'. One might also note that 'Aum/Venus/Capricorn Rising' has the concision 'Hum-Allah' lacks. The three-part structure focuses things, prevents over-reliance on just one groove, one vibe. Sanders' playing of the melody, and variants on it, are the main focus here; either Sharrock's not playing, or he's just really undermiked - I guess guitar in avant-jazz wasn't really too common at the time; maybe producer Bob Theile just didn't know how to deal with it.

(C) 'Capricorn Rising'

'Capricorn Rising' seems to be a variation on the melody of 'Venus', no less sublime. It's as if Pharoah taps into this stream of melody which is that of the universe - he takes a little fragment, puts it in bar lines, turns it into a melody of its own - self-sufficient, but part of a greater whole. And I guess that's the essence of jazz improvisation too - endless variation, and sometimes that reality can include what we'd term noise, fearsome sounds of overblown shrieks - all part of Pharoah's 'Journey to the One'. Earth-bound for transcendence, Pharoah's playing here acknowledges difficulty and struggle; indeed, it **incorporates** them into lyricism, rather than retreating into the slightly drippy peace-and-love sentiment, as with 'The Creator Has a Masterplan.'

So, where does that love 'Tauhid' as a whole? Well, it shows that, for all their reputations, free jazzers wrote damn good tunes, often better than the mainstream guys' – check out Frank Wright's 'Kevin My Dear Son' or 'Shouting the Blues' for other examples. It also ends too soon – an incomplete record. Obvious highlights - the 'Lower Egypt' solo, the melodic rhapsody of 'Venus' and 'Capricorn Rising' - remain flashes that never quite develop, and the lack of any real extended free jazz purification /catharsis feels like a missed opportunity (in particular, I can't help wishing we'd heard more of Sonny Sharrock). It was this uncertainty with **form** that was the major problem in Sanders' career, I think - not that I'm suggesting he should have tethered himself down more to the sort of structures/strictures the critics accused him of abandoning, but the solutions he came up with were often rather simplistic, aiming for coherence and instead getting a too broad-brush approach that tended to emphasize mood and vibe over detail and engagement.

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SANE HYSTERIA: THE MUSIC OF GHEDALIA TAZARTES

By David Grundy

Ghédalia Tazartès' music comes from everywhere, and nowhere. One would thus be tempted to call it a kind of sonic utopia, the imaginary concoction of a place of diverse accents and melodies, a Pangaea-like state. One would be thus tempted, if the music was not so profoundly concerned with, and related to, the material realities of the now – in its use of cheesy keyboard sounds, modern recording technologies, and the most ancient and, conversely, the most immediately accessible of all sounds – the human voice, in all its guises and disguises: high, low, fast, slow, amused and despairing. Ghédalia Tazartès: voice-box, juke-box, ventriloquist, mouthpiece.

His music, then, runs the gamut: no utopia, no idealisation, but the gamut of human emotion and invention traversed, even if only dipped into by the faintest touch of the toes; a manic but scatty musical encyclopaedism which shows up the absurdity of its own project and revels in this, at the same time realising it as part of a flawed human condition, where relation is unclear and where leaps in logic and association are just part of the helter-skelter tapestry of thought and life, at once exhilarating and terrifyingly tipping to the abyss, spinning out of control into who knows what void.

I said that Tazartès' music comes from everywhere and nowhere. But of course I should have said that it comes from himself. As the liner notes to one of his records put it, “Ghédalia is the orchestra and a pop group all in one person: the solitary opera explodes himself into an infinity of characters.” He is indeed a one-man orchestra, generating almost all of the sounds on his records and patching them together by overdubbing, though of course his use of sampled sounds and interactions with traditions, however warped and barely-recognisable, lets something else speak through him. What that something that speaks is, is what constitutes the compelling individuality of his sound, even as it seems to come from something beyond individuality. To adopt the title of one of his pieces, the music of Ghédalia Tazartès might also be ‘Le Dernier Concert’: the last music in the world, the only thing that is left but which contains within itself every other kind of music there has been; so utterly singular as to sound like very little else, in its totality, yet so peppered with reference and sonic similarity that it almost overburdens itself to the point where chaos sinks to noise, or to silence. Poised on that edge, dancing crazily all the while, one finds the enigmatic figure of Ghédalia Tazartès.

Who, though, is this man? Paris resident, he was born to Turkish parents in 1947 (making him just over 60 at the time of writing, though it’s hard to tell his age from the available photographs, given the ever-present Trilby which covers the upper part of his head). There’s not really that much detailed information to go on, although the recent interview in ‘The Wire’ magazine has prompted him out of the obscurity in which he was immersed for so many years, since the recording of his first album in 1979. We can even view images of the apartment in which he has lived since 1967. It’s not so much cluttered as packed full of *things*: a mirror ball hangs from the ceiling and a set of pan-pipes hangs on the wall above a hat, next to which a globe perches precariously on the top of a very large speaker, both leaning at rather lop-sided angles, while a pair of rather antiquated-looking keyboards are wrapped in plastic as if they haven’t been touched since purchase. Such diversity, of course, makes its way into the music, and it’s therefore possible to see how the man’s life is connected with his output (he goes as far as to say that he doesn’t know if he would be a musician without his apartment). But I’d want to be cautious about biographizing things too much, as that would lose us the wonderful singularity which these works of art so obviously gift us.

If the man’s biography is obscure, the music trail he’s left isn’t much better-known. Between his 1979 debut, ‘Diasporas’, and his latest album, ‘Hysterie Off Musique’ (reviewed in the previous issue of ‘eartrip’), he’s released a total of ten albums, not all of them full-length, on various labels. Not the largest corpus over a thirty-year period, and not the most easily-accessible, either: many of the albums are either out-of-print or extremely hard to get hold of, despite a number of re-issues, meaning that few people actually have the chance to listen to the music, even if they *have* heard of its elusive producer.



I came across Tazartès quite by chance: browsing a ‘sharity’ blog under the ‘experimental’ tag, I came across a download link for an album entitled ‘Tazartès Transports.’ I knew nothing about the artist or any other recording details – even the date of release – but the music was utterly captivating and I listened to the album repeatedly over the next few days. Utterly disregarding any generic conventions, any categorisation, I found ‘Transports’ to unfold in a manner that was both hypnotic and disorienting, full of what seemed to be echoes of other musics, but ending up sounding like nothing else I’d heard. Vocal samples wove their way in and out of the music: often, these were gravely beautiful, Arabic-sounding melodies, sometimes played normally in the midst of much complex electronic trickery, sometimes speeded up, sometimes slowing down, sometimes simply allowed to unfold in a quietly meditative haze. The same samples re-appeared on different tracks, a woman’s laughter sounding light and airy on one piece, sinister and nightmarish on another, dissonant noise building up underneath until, just at the climactic moment, the music unexpectedly switched direction for a moody, vaguely Oriental soundscape full of high-pitched electronic speaks and sqanks and something that sounded like a bird...or a cicada. Screams of "All animals have personalities" added a comedic touch to the fifth piece, and at another point, Tazartès produced something which, for a few seconds, seemed strangely like an Evan Parker saxophone solo. ‘Transports’ was intriguing not just for the sheer variety of sounds, but for the way it merged the human and the machine, the emotional and the robotic, cutting-edge electronic sounds with the simplicity of ancient melody.

Before popping Tazartès’ name into google (as one does), I thought that this must be contemporary electronic music, of the Autechre/Aphex Twin variety (though a lot stranger) – my evidence being the dirty groove of ‘Transports 10’, and the squelchy, watery sounds heard on ‘Transports 8’, which are familiar effects in clubs today (though what Tazartès does with them this isn’t exactly what I’d call dance-able). Unbelievably, though, I discovered that it had been recorded back in the 1980s (with three more recent, slightly less adventurous bonus tracks). Such a historical disjunct, such an apparent impossibility, seems even more extreme than Miles Davis’ anticipation of so many developments in contemporary dance and electronic music on ‘On the Corner’. Stranger still because, whereas Miles’ album sprang to fame (or, to put it more accurately, to infamy), Tazartès work simply never appeared in the entire official story of musical development, even in accounts which pride themselves on delving into the most obscure corners, investigating the dustiest and most untouched nooks and crannies.

This might actually be a good thing, as well as a manifest injustice. The fact that this is not a ‘known’ music (let alone ‘well-known’) allows one to focus solely on the sound, shatters a

reliance on knowing ‘background detail’, on explaining what one hears as the manifestation of some extra-musical trend. And that is surely the best way to approach any music, not just Tazartès’ perplexions. In the rest of the article, then, I’ll explore in detail some of the man’s recorded output and see what I can make of it, with as little resource to biography or background as I can (although I’ll also try to avoid presenting it as something hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world).

To begin, then, with the first record, ‘Diasporas’, released in 1979 on the Cobalt label. A pair of pieces which are, respectively, the fourth and fifth tracks on the album, succinctly demonstrate the mixture of more traditional sounding, acoustic work and more experimental electronics. ‘Quasimodo Tango’, a fairly straight tango piece by French electroacoustic composer Michel Chion, is nonetheless made odd both by its subject (the odd/grotesque pairing of Hugo’s hunchback of Notre Dame with tango), and the way Tazartès’ voice comes in and out of the mix. ‘Reviens’, meanwhile, is off in entirely stranger territory, and has to be heard to be believed.

Of course, there’s much more on the record than just these two short tracks, and it’s worth considering the ‘thematic backdrop’ to the whole. A diaspora is the dispersion of people from their original homeland, and so one could hear the music as reflecting some of this (often deeply distressing) sense of loss and change; but at the same time Tazartès’ diasporas create their own new homeland through music, a geographically unspecific region drawing on many cultures – a kind of cultural home. This is a new flexibility of nationhood and being, belonging. The utopian ideal realised in music! Babel vanquished! Or maybe more something closer to the imaginative visions of Rimbaud in ‘Illuminations’, pushed to the brink of meaning in an aesthetic experience which, perhaps, realises what can, or does not exist in the ‘other’ world, the ‘real’, the ‘physical one’.

There might be a fair share of worry (even guilt) behind this, as well as celebration, and we find this a few years later with ‘Transports’. As Jan Opdebeeck puts it, “Transports is a dark, jagged record which maybe even stages a social reality; a feeling which is evoked by the (trying, aggressive, shying...) way of speaking and singing, and the diversity of contexts (which are provided with a social charge) and manipulations.”



That’s not to say that there’s oppressive doom and gloom: indeed, the previously-mentioned ‘Transports 5’ adds a broadly comedic touch, with Tazartès screaming “all animals have personalities” in completely whacked-out fashion. Nonetheless, there are definite moments of melancholy: ‘Transports 6’ sounds like it’s a vocal with instrumental accompaniment (a dulcimer, a piano?) being played backwards, giving it that trippy effect familiar from the Beatles’ work after their return from India, but with a more introverted, mournful quality, as a

second vocal strand is overdubbed at the end and the voices gracefully entwine, before an abrupt cut into the harsh chanting and grunts of the next piece. Meanwhile, 'Transports 2' which piles up a thicket of electronic sounds, clanging church bells overlaid with various whines and buzzings, before a pensive clarinet lays a melody over the top.

What's intriguing about these last two pieces, and the album as a whole, is the way they merge the human and the machine, the emotional and the robotic, cutting-edge electronic sounds with the simplicity of an ancient melody. It's the sort of concept that could easily overwhelm the work, or just come across as crude, but, as it is, Tazartès pulls it off magnificently.

'Tazartès' (1987) finds the artist using his new keyboard to create drones and weird multi-tracked figures that repeat round themselves in filigree swirls, all underneath his vocals, whether declaimed as on 'Merci Stéphane', or leading a dance on 'Yama Yama'. Signs of the times (the taint of the 80s) are also the repeating beats, though the majority of these might as well have come from any time – the repeating guitar loop and percussion sounds on 'Merci Stéphane' could have come from a 70s jazz-funk record. And that's why Tazartès' music is like 'counterfactual' history: a vision of what music might have been, the creation of an impossible fantasy whose impossibility is nonetheless challenged because it is perfectly audible on these records.

At this stage, it might be worth quoting Matt Ingram, a.k.a. Woebot, whose blog contains some thoughts on Mr Tazartès which seem particularly apposite to our lines of enquiry at this point. "Key to the proceedings is the character Tazartès presents to us. His is a profoundly Burroughsian vision. Like Burroughs's story 'the talking arsehole', concerning the boundary between matter, flesh and character, Tazartès poses uncomfortable questions about the Western conception of "the human". Distorting his voice into a cretinous rasp, ululating like an animal, wailing like a child, smearing the boundaries between Arabic and French pronunciations and languages he is always engrossing to listen to. In some senses the accompanying electronics, which form the score to his voice, would be of secondary interest were the concrete pile-up of found sound and prehistoric mantra-onics not so equally fascinating. Tazartès adopted the pose of Tibetan Bedroom Buddha decades before the likes of The Aphex Twin and his ilk, and it's a cruel shame that his work isn't more widely admired."

There's a lot to unpack, and admire, in this account; most of all, I think that Ingram's emphasis on Tazartès' self-presentation, as character, is an instructive one. To a certain extent, there's a really explicit sense that Tazartès is creating this identity called 'Ghédalia Tazartès', whether it be real or fictive, or a mixture of both. Either way, it's the weird case of an identity created solely through music (only in recent years has Tazartès' visage become visible, through photos in the scattered available interviews – most recently, that in *The Wire* – and through the concert appearances, perhaps sparked by that *Wire* coverage). Due to this fact, and due to the magpie, polymorphous nature of the musical identity itself, one could argue that Tazartès is enacting some sort of an escape from a fixed identity – or, to put it another way, is multiplying his identities out, constructing a hosts of selves which refuse a compartmentalisation of self off from experience, from tradition and from the world. Both more honest and more whimsically fictive than something more stable, it teases out certain philosophical profundities through its playful teasing; labour disguised as play, thoughtfulness disguised as wild, mischievous anarchism. Maybe more than this – the breakdown of such simple oppositional categorisation, so that labour and play, thoughtfulness and the mischievous, seriousness and humour, collapse into each other, in almost dialectical resolution, which one would hesitate to call a resolution at all.

'Un Ivrogne Sur Le Mont Blanc' – 'A Drunkard on Mont Blanc': the title suggests a deliciously absurd and rather precarious situation whose whimsical conception seems typical of the way that Tazartès mind works. His shivery vocals hint at the mountainous chill; underneath, the processed keyboard sounds remind one of Indian tablas, though this reminiscent is conditional on a realisation that they are an imitation. The very falsity of this imitation is highlighted – one realises that these are not tablas almost straightforwardly – so that these see more like the idea of tablas, the reconstructed dream, the treated reminiscence of the quality of sound present in tablas (perhaps arising from the hazy fog in the mind of the titular drunkard). Tablas, then, function as a kind of spiritual presence: abstracted from their environment (the music

Tazartès spins round them has little in common with the Indian classical music where the instruments are normally found) and from themselves (these are not actually tabla), there is nevertheless a kind of affinity which one might call the 'spirit' of tabla.

'Elle Eut Des Étouffement Aux Premières Chaleurs Quand Les Poiriers Fleurirent' is a line from Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*: "With the first warm weather, when the pear trees began to blossom, she suffered from shortness of breath." It would be foolish to go so far as to seeing the piece as an explicit illustration of that line – particular as it is completely ripped from the context of the novel's narrative, so that it suggests its own, separate narrative, becoming poeticised into a statement whose propositional is made to suggest a hovering, non-propositional sense which surrounds it like an aura. Rather, the piece relates to its title in the same way that the non-propositional aura relates to the statement it surrounds, in a mysterious fashion which one cannot identify precisely – and which one could easily discard completely. Yet the desire is to retain it, to cling to the mystery at the same time as wishing to probe it – a conflicted urge which somehow re-imagines conflict as pleasure (and thus, might it not be too fanciful to say, attempts to negate conflict's divisive and destructive force).

Tazartès' declamatory, multi-tracked vocals are faintly reminiscent of a Turkish muezzin's call to Friday prayers, before a startling jump cut creates the impression that his voice has morphed into that of a woman singing a-quasi operatic aria. I call that moment a jump cut, and I think it has the same disorienting effect as the filmic technique pioneered by Jean-Luc Godard in 'A Bout de Souffle': the violation of the 360-degree rule whereby two shots shown in succession must be 360-degrees apart; the result of breaking this rule is that the eyes perceives a jump, a leap between the two shots, disrupting the smooth continuity of perception that we expect from the moving image. The impression is one of simultaneous disruption and an odd merging – where what seem like two unrelated images are at the same time revealed to in fact be very nearly the same shot, and thus create a puzzling near-simultaneous conjunction and disjunction, literally in the blinking of an eye – a process too fast to be fully comprehended by the human brain before it has gone. Tazartès' sudden switch from his own voice to that of the female singer has a similar quality, although its process is essentially a reversal of that I have described: what initially seems to be the same voice (Tazartès cuts himself off at a point when he is singing in quite a high register) is revealed to be that of a different person: what the ear, the mind perceives as the same voice is actually a different one, an odd merging which is actually illusory but which suggests a continuum of voices that once more refuses to create polite boundaries, this time between singers. The woman's aria is at first accompanied, then slowly interrupted by short samples of applause triggered by drum taps which at first sound like firework; the background having dissolved the song, Tazartès re-enters, his gentle and tender multi-tracked song over a quiet, almost inaudible keyboard accompaniment abruptly cutting into Middle-Eastern style declamations (again, multi-tracked) over looped percussion. Appropriately enough, the track cuts off in peremptory fashion, this final section forcibly concluded by the sound of something crashing over – perhaps the singer falling off a chair.

'Check Point Charlie' (1990) extends the technique of 'Elle Eut...', bringing together a number of short fragments into one continuous piece in suite-like fashion. 'Traces des Coups', the 15-minute long opening track ends with a quasi-medieval instrumental passage whose strangeness is amplified by being played on a rather tacky 1980s keyboard. It is as if Tazartès simultaneously realises the absurdity of the sounds but mitigates this by treating the instrument completely seriously, playing beautiful music on an un-beautiful instrument. Yet this is the opposite of the po-faced seriousness and ersatz grandeur of Vangelis or Jean-Michel Jarre; rather, it is a seriousness which is simultaneously absolutely genuine and completely absurd and hilarious. And that is frequently Tazartès' secret. He makes 'funny' vocal sounds, sings in a high-pitched shriek of a low croaky groan, enacts little dramas and dances, references styles in a manner that defies common sense, that hints at narrative but refuses to be linear, that suggests unity but only through dislocation.

The second track, 'Charlie's Retire', makes use of more varied spoken word. Tazartès uses snippets and loops from an absurd English dialogue he recorded with a young woman, peppering the final cut with "bloopers," thus playing on both levels (the fiction and the creation

of the fiction) at the same time. The dialogue also seems to contain some sort of political comment, though one which emerges from associations which seem deliberately randomized, in an almost improvisatory fashion, rather than from absolute specificity of intention. What one is presented with, then, is a patchwork of voices in which one ‘reads’ or ‘listens’ to the words with new meanings in different contexts – there is talk about officers, about liking where one is, which is not here, which cannot help but suggest displacement the imprisonment, enforcement and exclusion created by the Berlin Wall, at the same time as the fantasies it might generate (the desire not to be trapped where one is, to be ‘not here’, or nowhere), all undercut by a sexual, vaguely sado-masochistic edge.

Six years later comes ‘Voyage a L’Ombre’ (1996). The first seven tracks form a suite of short, linked pieces, the longest being 4 minutes long, the shortest only 40 seconds. ‘Voyage a L’Ombre 1’ comes across like some demented distortion of Kurt Weill, Tazartès’ high-pitched singing accompanied by the muffled, crackly sounds of what appears to be a looped recording of old-fashioned danced music. The following piece finds him again in a high-pitched register, his voice quavering in patterns that twist around opening and closing held notes, the sung phrases of similar lengths over a keyboard-loop and occasional bursts of a drum machine creating a repetitive, locked-in structure. Switching to a gruff growl, he sings over the unconventional rhythmic backdrop created from a loop of clapping hands and a child’s laughter, before his own voice drops out for a short burst of a soprano singing what sounds like an unaccompanied opera aria. This is then electronically distorted, fading in and out of the texture as if it were trying to push itself back into the pure clarity of its initial manifestation, quickly reaching complete failure as a new keyboard loop begins and establishes itself as the backdrop for the next few minutes. Over this, Tazartès once more comes in, deploying laughter as a musical device, in a hysterical and fairly disturbing way which is nonetheless near to being absolutely hilarious, especially as he adopts a ridiculous, hectoring high-pitched speech-sung register full of rolling ‘r’s and yawning vowels. The keyboard loop, with its faint delay setting, is left to its own devices for the next few minutes, and the suite ends with another brief fragment of song, Tazartès quietly spinning variations on simple melodic shapes, as if singing to himself, the faintest traces of electronic accompaniment (reminiscent of a whirring fan) and the slightest sounds of distant human activity suggesting that the setting is his apartment, the window open at a quiet and contemplative time of day.

As indicated by this account, a significant characteristic of the album is the way in which several voices are juxtaposed: one voice or a group of voices sing out a melody or variations, which are then looped alongside a speaking voice – or a voice making sounds somewhere between music and speech, such as the gurgling baby and the nonsense syllable soothings of the parent in ‘Berceuse’. The latter is an instance which also questions notions of what constitutes a conversation – for, though neither can really understand what the other is saying, in a propositional, semantic sense, meaning is nevertheless communicated in a different way – a kind of communication poised between the meaning-based sounds of language and the less obviously significatory sounds of music, which collapses the boundaries between the two. As Jan Opdebeeck puts it, “speech, singing, and music lose their identity as it were, only to become absorbed in the abstract, choral composition.”

Such resistance of categorisation is paralleled in the piece’s other ambiguities: what sounds like a flute setting on a keyboard plays unquiet, rather unsettling chromatic lines underneath the baby’s happy gurgles and Tazartès’ own lullaby whisperings, ending with just the voice and faint traffic rumble. It’s not your conventionally peaceful lullaby, but manages an intimacy arguably far greater than in such a convention – a deeply loving and tender urge to sleep which encompasses the fears that yet lurk within this act – whether they be the fears of the child, unwilling to cease its wide-eyed wondering gaze at the world, or the fears and worries of the parent whose own experience tempers his enjoyment of such an innocent vision of the world. As such, it’s probably the most convincing musical exploration of parenthood in existence – and yet it is far from being simply this. That one interpretation, I’m sure, is just one of many that could be made, and which it would do an injustice to the piece to ascribe as the sole ‘meaning’.

The French word ‘ombre’ means shadow or shade, darkness or obscurity, and the disc’s title thus translates as something like ‘Voyage to the Shadows’. But I think it might not be too fanciful to pick up on the sonic similarity between ‘Ombre’ and ‘Homme’, man – this is a journey of man, or of a man, in and around the shadows which he inhabits and which are at the unreachable, the undecipherable parts of his actual existence – which could mean a kind of interior journey into the heart of the self, an examination of the very nature of one’s being, of the aspects of one’s being which one still knows so little about.



It could also be one of those journeys of development – the life of man, the different stages of life, though not in the traditional linear fashion. Rather, I’d see it as being an interaction between different stages, merging the perceptions and perspectives with which experience is viewed: child-like but knowing, infantile but wise – a kind of dramatisation of the relation between different generations (most specifically, as we heard in ‘Berceuse’, between parent and child) which simultaneously takes the role of all its main actors, both assuming the perspective of none and the perspective of all.

That interpretation, I think, is supported by the front cover – or, if not supported, prompted by it. A photograph shows a baby looking at the camera. Sunlight would be streaming onto his face, blinding him, were it not for the protective hand held up by the woman who cradles him in her arms – her gesture gives more than a hint of religious iconography, the photograph echoing a serene painting of Madonna and Child. The baby’s look is as ambiguous as baby’s expressions so often are: between the smile into which it will probably evolve, simple drop-jawed wonder and surprise, and an almost vacant uncertainty. It’s exactly the same kind of hovering enacted by the ‘Berceuse’ piece.

One might also reflect that the shadow which the mother’s hand places over the child’s face is a protective one. This would mitigate against the way we might be tempted to read the ‘Ombre’ in ‘Voyage a L’Ombre’ as having negative connotations – death, shades of hell, uncertainty, the unknown, the echo of originating objects which are absent or unseen (as shadows are the echo of the objects which cast them). Rather, the shadow is a protection from the blinding sunlight which would, paradoxically, *not* enable one to see (the opposite of light’s usual function).

“Human kind cannot bear very much reality”, as Eliot put it: this shielding off is thus a necessary reaction to an overabundance of sensory experience, that kind of overwhelming volume of data which one might expect to be a baby’s initial impression of the world and which must soon coalesce into more organised impressions, impressions which shut off certain data as irrelevant in a selection of what is relevant at that particular moment. This development might not be unambiguously celebrated – it involves the narrowing off of perception as well as its clarification, the hardening into set ways and modes of viewing the world, the development of prejudice and blinkered version.

And one might now feel tempted into another interpretation of the album: that in its gleeful refusal of boundaries and-deliberately un-categorisable, un-placeable strangeness, it reconstructs the infant state. Yet I would argue that there is by no means a regressive desire for the naively innocent over-abundance of the initial child-like perception; rather, knowingness exists alongside unknowingness in a way that is both fertile and exists as the worrisome reminder of processes that are more complex than we would like them to be: simultaneous loss and gain, a Hegelian inseparability of progress and decline.

There is more, much more, but for now, let's content ourselves with Tazartès' latest album, 'Hysterie Off Musique' (2007). Individual tracks are named after particular genres (Soul, Country, etc), but this is clearly ironic, for the artist encompasses and moves beyond so many genres that to limit himself to one would be not merely undesirable, but, one suspects, virtually impossible. 'Soul' is 'soul' in the sense of passion, emotion, more than the sense of a particular genre of twentieth-century African-American music. Tazartès, it seems, is more interested in the emotions and significations behind genres than in their explicit content or even form.

Perhaps no better concluding words can be found than Tazartès' own, from The Wire Interview: "My music is like human nature, which is paradoxical. If somebody falls over, you laugh. But he has to fall over for real. If he's pretending to fall over, nobody laughs. When it's completely serious, then it's funny." And that is frequently Tazartès' secret. He makes 'funny' vocal sounds, sings in a high-pitched shriek of a low croaky groan, enacts little dramas and dances, references styles in a manner that defies common sense, that hints at narrative but refuses to be linear, that suggests unity but only through dislocation. It verges on the 'hysteria' referenced in the title to this latest album, but, the more you think about it, the more you realise it's the sanest hysteria you've heard.



Apologies: I don't know the original provenance of these images, so haven't been able to credit them or ask permission for their use in this article.

berlin november 2008: visions sounds meetings

Berlin Jazz Festival / FMP Total Music Meeting (40th Anniversary)

by mark anthony whiteford

i met a woman on the train. we talked about the east and west and what it meant that it was gone. and what it meant that once we had a dream of socialism. and she lived in the horror whilst i grew up far away wishing it could all be the dream and inequality would get wiped out. 'it's over now' she said and my daughters are living lives i could never have hoped for. 'and i'm glad i'm not in that any more. but now life is not quite right. it's only about money and nothing else now here in the west.' she still lives in her same house in what once was the east.

the revolution? it happened. things changed. capitalism now reigns like some self-obsessed monarch/patriarch [the west is the best/victorious. the rest of the world can suck on a gun barrel/a broken coke bottle/nothing. the fmp is alive [and kicking?] all the men are still here in their blazers and shoes and shirts. all with slightly podgy bellies. still playing[the same stuff40years on?] THE FMP IS 40YEARS OLD. i met a man who remembered the first gig he saw with peter brötzmann 40 years or so ago. 'yes' he said 'we believed everything is different from now on.'

is it?

Wertmüller Project w/ Brötzmann & Pliakas feat. Keiji Haino, Peter Evans, Mars Williams

- Michael Wertmüller · drums
- Marino Pliakas · bass
- Peter Brötzmann · saxes
- Mars Williams · tenor sax
- Keiji Haino · electronics, guitar, voice
- Peter Evans · trumpet

Quasimodo, 6/11/08 (Berlin Jazz Festival)

peter brötzmann played in a jazz club [a very standard jazz club-tables waitresses <yep waitresses only. no waiters in a jazz club man> all the people on stage were men. it was very macho and loud and dense. brötzmann played some very lyrical stuff at times. [maybe trying to a force a wedge of something else against/within the loud dense noise onslaught?]] i enjoyed it. it was ceaselessly loud and dense and full tilt and it made me laugh or feel exhilarated or both. keijo haino was there and he was refreshingly something else. like a wild cat let loose in the circus of macho men in his frilly black lace and long hair and screaming wailing fumbling guitar and voice and pedals. there was some very heavy unrelenting bass and drums and some other guy on saxophones screaming and snarling. and then peter evans who kind of seems to be following in the wake of axel dörner but seems to me to also have some of that more traditional male/berlin/free improv bluster in that he sweats and tussles and clearly shows how much he's wrestling with the trumpet forcing it to do things by feats of heroic muscular force. by the time he's done his shirt is wet and testifies to his male heroic struggle even though his sound world is more out and unconventional than the likes of brötzmann and the other fmp horn players i witness on this trip.

**clayton thomas/peter evans/axel dörner/henry grimes
ausland, 3/11/08**

on my way into berlin i rush from the airport [yep goodbye trees and planet-the western male pursues his desire whilst the asians drown. hello easyjet and the riches of the western world stolen from the rest of the non-human 'other' people [not quite people]] to get to an abandoned church [the white male god has vacated and the white male anarchists have taken residence.<some things change maybe?> for the [better?]]

i arrive in time to catch peter evans storming away with de rigeur free improv [free jazz?] double bass slogging it out with him. they're both going all over the place with some physical force. peter evans is sweating. i'm a bit thrown by this all. i've got evans down as a quiet noisemaker in the vein of dörner. but this is quite full blast and muscular [that word again] soon it's over somehow. i only get about a five mins of it.

i try to pay someone but the man who takes the money has gone home so there's no one i can pay. which is neat and refreshingly uncommercial. 'i'll buy a cd' i say to the soundman but i dont actually. i'm wondering what i've missed. what i really wanna catch is axel dörner with peter evans since i've never heard either of them live and i love what i've heard on my hifi so i'm keen to see what they'll be like live and together.

then a familar looking man comes shuffling into the hall with a violin case under his arm. people seem to have been not expecting him. and it seems an impromptu duo set is got underway involving him and one of the bassists. he has his violin out and is rustling scrappy old bits of paper about on a table. i'm tryin to figure out who he is. but i guess the context of berlin blocks me fathoming it out. he reads some poetry that's full of de rigeur black american references/ phrases/melody. redolent of ntozake shange/maya angelou/william parker. lots of references to skyscrapers being like cliff faces and lots of references to infinity freedom alienation. i'm trying to remember who he is. the closest i can get is william parker who he aint. the poetry is very badly delivered. faltering and stumbling. barely audible above the accoustic bass. it's highly impromptu and the bassist and the poet dont seem to know what form the thing is gonna take, when to stop when to keep going, which i like a lot. when the stranger picks up the violin things flow much more freely and there's a drive and a searingness to the violin whilst the bass is now more comfortably in the 'supporting' role it seems to me.

at some point i write on a little flyer 'who is he?' and pass it to the woman at my side[no women on stage but women in the audience] there is no stage. i'm not completely enjoying the music. i'm enjoying the violin and bass fine but the man keeps returning to poetry and i keep thinking 'this is displacing the quartet music' which i believe is gonna ensue for the rest of the set.

i get my piece of paper on which the woman's male partner has written 'henry grimes' and i'm beside myself with incredulity. i am amazed to find myself in this abandoned church off my plane face to face with henry grimes. i'm thinking this man has played with albert ayler and this man has survived the vile racist oppression of vile capitalist america and is still here and so am i with him. i am privileged. i'm still not digging the poetry though.

and i still want dörner and evans.

eventually dörner evans and the 2 bassists get to play. and one of the bassists invites grimes to sit in. so we get a quintet. it's cool. i'm happy. dörner and evans blend nicely. the bassists and mr grimes keep up a more straight forward thing than dörner and evans jumps about between the string players and dörner's soundscapes fairly undriven by dominant rhythm and thrusting dynamics. i like what dörner does best. i like his slabs of rebellious sounds. he quietly and with little outward show of physical exertion pushes some incredible sounds out into and under the quintet music.

i see evans three more times.

- once with brotzman and company as above.
- once solo.
- once with evan parker richard barrett and another bassist

solo he's quite incredible. totally pyrotechnics totally in the tradition of pushing the instrument beyond what it wants to do. but very quiet unlike the old guys. he plays a long set solo. 35minutes, maybe more. what i will say in favour of the fmp guys is they dont kowtow to the current 'audience freindly' strategy of presenting bite size chunks. they allow a lot of very long sets to take place during this week long festival.

- keith and julie [tippetts]
- evan parker quartet
- john Edwards
- wachsmann turner kirchmann eckel

all play very long uninterrupted sets in the good old noncompromise freeimprov no concession to capitalism's bite size endless consumerist fandango. [roll up roll up get some more of these unsatisfying little things and make it all start up and go round again put your money in the slot it's the cumshot it's the cumshot slot.]

so yeah. he plays a long set. i'm fairly absorbed. i'm slightly caught up in that old jazz trip of marveling at his technique. but i think there's a sound piece that unfolds too and it's not just technique. [?] there's a fair bit of quiet and space in the piece. a fair bit of contemplation and wonder. he also does a short 'encore' and his shirt is soaked in sweat by the end. he has to do a very big warm up, before he plays. i hear him in the dressing room. which is obviously absolutely essential due to the extreme pressure he puts himself under when playing.

TIPPETT/KELLERS/TIPPETT

- **Julie Tippett** voice
- **Willi Kellers** dr, perc
- **Keith Tippett** piano

Berlinische gallery, 6/11/08.

a set by keith and julie tippett in trio with a drummer. i love this set. i feel it's totally sweet. it is what it is. it is what it's always been with keith and julie. keith does his thing. it's the long 45minute keith solo style. he does the thing at the very top of the piano and of course the thing at the very bottom of the piano. with some delicate and jazzy piano in and around it all. he seems to be accommodating julie at times. he shakes his rattle too. julie does her voice thing which to me seems so unassuming, so delicate and unsure and thin. and she seems self assured enough as to allow this offering of hers to be enough for us for her for keith and the drummer. she leaves a lot of space too. she seems to fit in with what's ensuing. sometimes you feel she's taken the lead and the 2 men follow her. she plays some little instruments. a tibetan singing bowl a recorder an mbira that she plays with a little mallet. and between them they weave a delicate quiet slow unforced/unforceful mesh. it's very quiet. the drummer does very delicate things. he waves his brushes in the air. he's still and quiet. i love them all and i feel grateful and blessed that such people and such music can still exist in a vile epoch which would have preferred to crush such entities as this if only it even knew they were there.
when it's over they bow and say thankyou and they go. hell, it'll be a poorer place to exist on, this planet, when mr grimes and these people all bow out.

what else was there?

john edwards bass solo

Berlinische gallery, 6/11/08.

again another long no concessions timewise set. up until recently i'd not seen a lot of john edwards live. and lately i've seen too much of him. seems like everytime the cube cinema put on any improvised music john edwards will be the default musician. he plays very loud[via amps] and very muscular. he has a set of things he does. and he throws himself about a fair bit when he gets going, which he invariably does. seeing him play is a bit like watching hearing a standard jazz musician in that he kind of visits various places and will always 'peak'[ie a moment of loudness or speed that would like to imply some kind of frenzy] at some point he will reach some kind of 'resolution' at 'the end.' in berlin he did 1 this. there are times when he seems to be delighting in the sound he is creating as if he's surprised himself yet whenever i see him he does these certain things –

- 1 bows with great physical force breaking strings as he goes
- 2 goes very quiet and hesitant at times
- 3 smacks the body of the bass
- 4 rubs the body of the bass with a wettened finger
- 5 sticks things in the strings and smacks them about
- 6 plucks the strings above where he's fingering
- 7 bows the bass below the bridge

he often visits each of these places at almost the same point in any given piece he's playing. and rarely misses one of these certain actions within any performance i've seen. he's a seemingly 'very nice chap and very unassuming and polite.' at the venue in berlin i saw him met and received by some very well behaved middle class berlinische galleryafficianados who seemed very pleased to be met by him in this very nice and unassuming way.

i also saw him play during my most hated moment of the whole festival.

- **Manfred Schoof** trumpet
- **Gerd Dudek** tenor & soprano saxophones
- **John Edwards** double bass
- **Günter 'Baby' Sommer** dr, perc

Berlinscher Gallery, 7/11/08.

i hated this set immensely and found myself diametrically opposed to the modus operandi of performance presented. a group of elder statesmen who call themselves improvisers who for some inexplicable [to me] reason chose to present us with some very sloppily arranged and executed 'tunes' and structures. all of them except edwards wore the fmp *male* blazer and shirt and de rigeur 1950s *male* haircuts. the absolute low point of despair for me was when the drummer entered into a standard jazz style 'cutting contest' goading and challenging edwards to play louder/faster and keep up with the barrage/charade of pushes and shoves that the drummer put before him whilst sending gestures and smiles to the other older *guy* compatriots seeming to say 'hey do you think he can cut it and hang in there with me/us?' and when it was all over he gave edwards the nod of approval like some ridiculous scorcese 'gangster' [middle class white male actor in fact] who indicates to the assembled macho men that 'the boy is ok' once he's killed a man.

- **Evan Parker** tenor & soprano saxophones
- **Peter Evans** trumpet
- **Adam Linson** double bass
- **Richard Barrett** sampling keyboard, live electronics

Berlinscher Gallery, 8/11/08.

oh fuck, i'm so sorry but i have this ongoing problem with evan parker's current output and stance. i'm really sorry. i love evan parker and he started up this thing we all care so much about and live and breathe didnt he? but what is going on with mr parker at the moment? i just wanna cry to be honest. i've seen him several times over the last couple of years and i've heard him on the radio several times.[once on radio 3 playing a monk tune. hell. help. get me outta here] and i just feel so badly that mr parker has stagnated. he just does the things he does. he takes little breaks and then he picks up his saxophone and you know what's gonna come out and i even have a strong sense of how long he's gonna play for before laying out again. and i experience his playing as 'saxophone solos' laid over the top of what's going on instead of being integrally woven into the music fabric.

tonight he's up there with peter evans and this is the first time i've heard them together. so i'm intrigued how this is gonna work out since i currently feel that evans has taken up the mantle along with the likes of axel dörner and gone on a mission to see where we might push the music

next. [into more purely abstract sound away from form\format\?] and i usually enjoy richard barrett. indeed i'd rank him amongst my favorite free improvisors of the moment. [check out forch; spin networks] i've also seen evans playing with fokt replacing john butcher to some effect at a gig in london a while back at spittalfields which worked ok was a great gig apart from the dire sound in the echoing church hall.

but for this gig i couldnt get my head into it. i felt there was so much potential for parker and evans to interlock and get into something and you've even got the circular breathing thing they both do. but it didnt seem to come together at all. the sound was dire fmp free jazz mix so the saxophone and trumpet were way up front so no mesh could be heard. not that there was one. seems evan parker wanted richard barrett to take on the drummer role which seems a bit sad; what i always loved about european free improv was its ability to forego the classic jazz line up and consider itself a chamber music. anyways. they played a long set. i've listened to it several times since. but i cannot make anything happen in my head. nothing seems to come together. if you treat it like a free jazz concert maybe it works. i couldnt feel parker and evans meeting. and evans didnt seem able or willing to bend to meet the very differant soundscape evans was bringing to the horn music. and poor old richard barrett and linson were left bubbling away in the background like some jazz rhythm section mixed right down by the soundman.

enough.

what else did i see and hear?
something that felt like nothing

- **Anthony Pateras** prepared piano
- **Lê Quan Ninh** percussion.

Berlinische gallery, 7/11/08.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body [say no more. say no more. yes indeed government funded eh?]

this was weird. all i experienced was a couple of men coaxing a series of fairly interesting unorthodox and treated sounds from their respective instruments. a piano with treated and dampened strings so that the sound was distorted but nonetheless full of predictable neo/quasi/cheap replicas of cheap simple rythms. clunk clank foursquare and repetitious. meanwhile the man with the drum and percussion instruments again coaxed some very extraordinary sounds from the skin of his upturned bass drum, but all to what effect? i ask myself a question here. how come sometimes when i listen to improvised music i feel all i've heard is an unsatisfactory series of random sounds whilst at other times i feel i'm experiencing something meanigfull. surely it's all just a random series of sounds innit? maybe i just like julie and keith tippets and i know them a bit so create meaning and spirit out of what they do? not that i need spirit to make music meaningful for me. i dont consider john butcher's music spiritual but i hear or feel something going on when he plays. what a lark what a plunge it all is. what nonsense and made-upness.

ha ha.

i cant keep going on about these gigs ad infinitum nauseum. so lets focus on something i liked. which i think is the last of the things i saw anyway. i missed some stuff i really wanted to see. i missed these things because i left to catch the brötzmann gig. i left the schoof/dudek/Edwards/sommer gig and had an early night cos i hated it so much.

this one i missed cos i went to see brötzmann instead elsewhere

- **Tomek Choloniewski** dr, perc
- **Miho Iwata** performance

Berlinische gallery, 6/11/08.

shame i'd've liked to see some performance. whatever happened to performance? i thought it was going somewhere. but then the great white british tate/government sponsored *art-fund-*

fuckover got hold of it and nailed it into the coffin of capitalism/ entertainment/ fakeculture.
so- ok, something i liked?

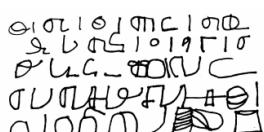
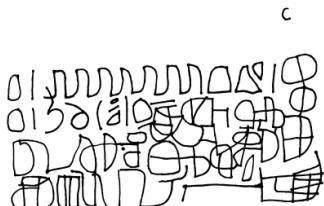
RONIT KIRCHMAN/ PHILIPP WACHSMANN/ PAUL LYTTON TRIO Joined by the artist SARAH B. ECKEL

- **Ronit Kirchman** violin, live electronics
- **Philipp Wachsmann** violin, live electronics
- **Paul Lytton** dr, perc, live electronics
- **Sarah B. Eckel** action painting .

Berlinische gallery, 8/11/08.

yep this was up there with the julie and keith set for me. it was so quiet and so slight. so slow and 'unclimatic.' it was a weave of delicate slight occurrences with lots of space gentle interweaving no one getting all 'worked up.' everyone quiet and attentive. it was so quiet and slight that at one point the painter drowned out the musicians with her paint brushes. she was quiet and seemed absorbed in her world yet seeming to respond/interact with the musicians. she padded about at the back for the most part slapping some paint boldly onto card at moments, ripping the cardboard the next. and at one point hammering it with a hammer. there were some bold black lines almost like calligraphics. the whole painting was quite mimimal and spacious considering they were on stage for 45 minutes. she wandered about the stage at times and physically interacted with the musicians. there was even a staged fake 'shock' moment where she took kirchman's violin and then hung it on the painting and action painted. did i mention she did some action painting. needless to say it wasnt really kirchman's real violin but a body double. it was grand to see some action painting, or any painting taking place on stage with live music. it took me back to the good old days of revolution and straight ahead rebellion in the western world back before the capitalists nailed us into the coffin of noncaring and irony/postmodern nihilism.

so here we are. 2009 or so it would appear. 40 years of fmp and where's it got us. the modernist men still rule imagining they're engaged in something radical in their suit jackets/blazers pouring out free jazz de rigueur with no mind or space for wondering what's coming next. the streets are not on fire. everybody says capitalism can only do good. the square building called the berolinische gallery sits close and comfortable alongside the holocaust museum and it's all on the tourist map. all the arabs live in poverty just around the corner. i asked some street kids playing outside their block of flats 'where's the berolinischer gallery' they had a great laugh at my german and hilariously told me 'yes it's the building with the coloured letters outside of it. yes look there. there it is.'



6-9 NOVEMBER 2008 // BERLINISCHE GALERIE
TOTAL MUSIC MEETING 08

An Interview with Graham Collier



The following interview was conducted by e-mail in October 2008.

Interviewer – David Grundy

DG: *The development of big band music after the Swing era tends, I think, to be something that's rather overlooked in much jazz criticism, and by jazz fans as well. Apart from exceptions like the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis and Kenny Clark/Francy Boland bands, or the Gil Evans Orchestra, small groups seem to have become the dominant form in the last 50 years. You're in an excellent position to talk about this because you played, for a time, in the Jimmy Dorsey orchestra, but your own bands are obviously part of a much more 'modern' tradition, so the scope of your experience is very wide. Do you have any thoughts on the changing status of the jazz big band?*

GC: I'm not sure that big bands have vanished. Economics have led them to be less visible, and the small group has become as you say the dominant form, but big bands exist when and where they can. Ron Atkins made an interesting point when he said that the long-term existence of a band such as Ellington's would have made his working with such as Eric Dolphy or Roland Kirk difficult. I think he has a point, but perhaps Ellington didn't want to work with those people? But the more important point is that the ad-hoc nature of bands such as mine can lead to the inclusion of people for one project (be it a short tour or a one-off) who the leader might admire, without the commitment on either side to 'join a band'. When I've worked recently there are some core people I always want to have around me – John Marshall, Art Themen, Steve Waterman to name three – but, for example, I had the chance to ask Karlheinz Miklin from Austria for the Third Colour gigs, James Allsopp for the 2004 concert, which is due out on CD next year, and the mass of people (trumpets: Wheeler, Lowther, Curson, Stanko, Schoof!!!) who were involved in the Hoarded Dreams project.

I think – and say in my new book, *the jazz composer, moving music off the paper*, that there are various kinds of big bands – although I prefer the term large ensemble. There are the recreators, ever popular, but in essence repeating with small variations what Don Redman laid down all those years ago – what I call grey music! Then there are the orchestrators, such as the early Gil Evans and Gerry Mulligan, who do something different with more or less the basic big band set up, what I've called 'advanced arranging'. Then there are those, such as Mingus and myself at times, who are 'painting new pictures', such as *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* and finally those who I say are 'taking a chance'. This includes late Gil Evans, Mingus again, and myself again, as well as groups like Globe Unity and the Italian Instabile Orchestra.

That's a quick gallop through what takes four chapters in the book, but it lays out areas where, except for the first, creative large ensemble music is happening, and is largely unsung. Have you heard Paul Grabowsky's 'We'll Meet Again'? Or Christian Muhlbacher's 'Over the Rainbow'? Both magnificent and largely unknown.

(Point of fact: I was only with the Jimmy Dorsey Ghost Band for a very short time).

DG: *One thing that you are clearly passionate about is jazz education, as evidenced by your work at the Royal Academy of Music. I wonder if you could perhaps talk a little bit about what it means to you, and why you think it's such a priority in the current climate.*

GC: I think the proof is in the pudding – in that James Allsopp, who I consider to be a great find – was at the Academy, through that he met Tim Giles, and Fraud was the result, Tom Cawley was at the Academy and met his drummer Josh Blackmore a few years later when Tom was teaching and Josh a student. And there are many more examples. Not that these kind of musicians wouldn't have made it anyway – my generation did, without most of us having a jazz education qualification (which means nothing on the bandstand anyway!) But education quickens the process, allows musicians to learn from the teachers' mistakes as well as their knowledge, and to meet and play with others of their age without hunting around for largely non-existent jam sessions (who are probably calling Blue Bossa anyway!).

Tom Cawley was part of a group of beboppers throughout his time at the Academy – the Fishwick twins to name but two – and no matter how hard we as teachers tried they wouldn't seem to budge into more creative music. The Fishwicks are doing well – good luck to them - but they are still in the same groove. Tom is doing well also, and is, rightly, being hailed as a creative find. He had the grace to tell me recently that he hadn't listened to me in college, but it had somehow sunk in beneath the surface and he now knows what I was trying to say. Which is one for the old man I reckon!

DG: *In a discussion with saxophonist Janne Murto, you talk about your perception of an emerging jazz aesthetic which is specifically European. Now I often feel that the idea that there can be particular 'national' sounds in music is sometimes rather unhelpful and stereotypical – for example, commentators might talk about Peter Brotzmann's 'blitzkrieg' approach. But, on the other hand, I think there might be something in what you say. You were the first British musician to graduate from Berklee, and you've taught all over the world – so, in that sense, you have some familiarity with American, British and European perspectives, all of which can differ. Perhaps you could expand on this idea of the European jazz aesthetic, and how it differs from the American?*

GC: The essential, very broad brush difference is decided by influences. If the Fishwicks listen to bebop all the while they'll never get away from that aesthetic, but if they are exposed, as James Allsopp was, to Charles Gayle at an early age then a different kind of American jazz comes into play, one that has been influenced by the free jazz movement in Europe. I write in the book that Americans have a whole load of baggage to shed before they can be free. We in Europe learnt from Miles and Ornette who had shed that bebop baggage on their own.

Short extract from Chapter 10, 'On not being an American' [in the forthcoming book, *the jazz composer*]: "Writing about the rise of abstract expressionism in America at a time when art was seen as European, critic David Sylvester wrote, 'In the search for the absolute and commitment to the new, it was advantageous not to be a European, not to be steeped in a tired culture.' He quotes Barnett Newman, one of the great painters in that style, as saying, 'I believe that here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture ... are creating images whose reality is self-evident ... We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth ... we are making [art] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings.' "

"This point is nicely developed by Sylvester, who says that Newman was influenced by Europeans such as Matisse and Giacometti but 'it was they who had to deal with "the weight of European culture" ... [I]t was because Newman was free of that weight that he could deal with Matisse and Giacometti and go on from there."

Jazz may be seen as a broader church outside of America, but some of those involved have also been defensive about their approach to the music. Although their roots were in jazz, free improvisers such as Derek Bailey eschewed the style, and the word. Others tried to erect

artificial barriers, proposing that American jazz is primarily note oriented, and European jazz is more interested in concepts of space, with Michael Brecker and Jan Garbarek presented as opposing examples. There is some truth in this, but if we look at John McLaughlin, European but very notey, and Bill Frisell, American but super-spacey, we soon realise that there are too many exceptions to posit any cast-iron rule. It might be safer to repeat what critic Bill Shoemaker said, when he got involved in a spat with British journalist Stuart Nicholson, an uncritical booster of most things European. ‘The argument/discussion is not so much America versus Europe, as real jazz versus pap’.

DG: I'd like to get your perspective on something I previously discussed with Mike Westbrook, because you, like him, are a prominent British bandleader/composer, although your careers have obviously developed in different ways. What do you think is the relationship of jazz to more avant-garde forms - free improvisation, free jazz - which often emerged from it, but which mainstream jazzers often seem to look down on? Perhaps we could talk about how your perceive this in your own work - as tension, or otherwise - and, then, how you think this relationship stands in the current musical climate, in Britain and elsewhere.

GC: In some ways I don't understand the question. Jazz is jazz and, for me can contain free improvisation, free jazz and much else besides. Perhaps it's time for a definition of what jazz is to me. Here's an attempt, again culled from my new book.

Kip Hanrahan's wonderful quote about Jack Bruce sums up jazz's reliance on the soloist: “[W]hat the hell does “conducted” mean anyway? ... sometimes it doesn't mean anything more than handing rolled steel to Jack Bruce and watching as he turns it into gold in front of thousands of people.”

Following that I wrote that a friend of a friend who described my work as ‘directing 14 Jackson Pollocks’ intuitively realised that I try to live the two truths of jazz: that it is about individuals, a lesson demonstrated long ago by Duke Ellington, and that it happens in real time, once, as Miles Davis and many others constantly show.

If the individuals you use, as bandleader or composer, are into freer playing (as many of my regulars are) then it will come in where the player feels it's appropriate. Roger Dean did a wonderfully far out synthesiser solo in part of my new CD, which was one of the reasons cited as to why it wasn't acceptable to one label I sent it to. (It's due out on my own jazzcontinuum label next spring.)

It's horses for courses – in one's listening choices as well. I find I have less and less time for the freak-out bands, all seemingly making as much noise as possible, and most of it reminds me of the 60s and 70s free jazz scene (no names but they know who I mean!). I have time for older jazz, like Sydney Bechet, who in some ways I would like to have had in one of my bands. I did write a suite for the great Scottish clarinettist Sandy Brown because I saw his style of playing could match in some ways with my band (because we had both missed out the bebop period in our influences). He admitted to being confused by some time-signatures, and, at times, John Marshall's drumming, but the end result was great.

Another quote from the jazz composer book: “This individualisation by the performers of what is written, whether it is a full melody or a single note, a scale, or a chord progression, is arguably the most important strength for a jazz composer, and developing this line of thinking has been a strong part of my development.”

DG: Your book ‘The Jazz Composer, moving music off the paper’ is going to be released in early 2009, and will obviously deal with these issues in quite some detail, but maybe I could gather a few of your views on the subject of jazz composition here, as well.

GC: I've touched on jazz composition above, but I believe the term is generally misunderstood. I can't express it better than I do in the book: “But, simple though it is, ‘C-Jam Blues’ has inspired many great jazz performances. In fact it could be argued that ‘C-Jam Blues’ is the epitome of the perfect jazz composition. It suggests and fulfils the main purpose of the genre: the provision of a strong and memorable framework which reflects the composer's

thinking, while stimulating and informing the improviser, who, ideally, is inspired without being inhibited. That statement, with one important proviso, is as relevant to a long complex piece as it is to a very simple blues.”

“The proviso is, that even though the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic material of the tune stay essentially the same, and even though the structure of the long complex piece may remain, the performances will have been, and should continue to be, essentially different.”

“This openness to change is the common ground of most jazz compositions. And their reason for being.”

DG: You recorded an album based around the work of author Malcolm Lowry ('The Day of the Dead'), and have also written pieces relating to the painters Paul Klee and Jackson Pollock – perhaps you could talk a bit about the relation you perceive between music and the other arts.

GC: The Australian composer Don Burrows said that as composers we ‘get our inspiration from anywhere which seems apt at the time’. Much of my work has been abstract – inspired by a particular occasion (*Three Simple Pieces*, written for my 60th birthday concert at the Academy), or perhaps a phrase which appealed (*The Third Colour*, from art critic Clement Greenberg, which I applied to my wish to find the third colour when you put something composed in front of some improvisers), or a physical thing (*Winter Oranges*, which were growing in our first winter in Spain, which inspired the idea of a loose biographical suite). It’s often the title that comes first and sets the creative juices flowing.

The ‘pictorial’ pieces such as the ones you mention are much the same, although in these cases there’s the obligation to acknowledge your sources in some way (especially the Lowry). The Klee and Pollock pieces were illustrated in their performances in Switzerland by projections of the actual paintings but that isn’t essential. With the Pollock I read up a lot and found phrases that summed up the painting for me, and which helped the inspiration, with the idea that those phrases, not the titles of the paintings, would be the main title and help the audience get into the work without necessarily seeing it. For example the piece inspired by *Alchemy* (which I saw in Venice recently and it’s staggering in its depth) has the title *Reverberations in and Beyond*, a phrase I took from this comment ‘Pollock’s [work]... has continued to produce reverberations in and beyond painting ever since.’ (Kirk Varnedoe from the MOMA 1998 exhibition catalogue.) The music I wrote was further out than the others in the suite and used freer elements.

I’m not sure that fully answers your point about ‘the relationship I perceive between music and other arts’ but I think they’re all different, but feed off each other as I have tried to show above. It was Anthony Caro who said ‘it was better to go to painting than to old sculpture because painting gave one ideas of what to do but no direct instructions on how to do it’. I listen to other jazz composers, and, to be honest, am not impressed too often. (One who has turned me on lately has been the Italian Roberto Bonati – see Recommedations on my jazzcontinuum site).

I think one of the problems that young jazzers make is *not* getting into other arts, including of course literature. Some – young and old have got into ‘other arts’, often with mixed results. Writing a 12 bar blues theme, followed by solos, and adding a title which implies that it’s been inspired by part or all of a literary work, or a painting, is a joke. But it’s happened often. (Suggestions on a postcard, but again they know, or should know, who they are!).

DG: I'd like to return to the avant-garde question now, though from a slightly different angle. Free jazz is seen by some as an aberration, a radical break from tradition, but I'd argue that it was actually a truer engagement with tradition than merely preserving certain styles in aspic. In relation to this, I found some interesting comments you made in the IAJE panel discussion from 2001 (<http://www.jazzcontinuum.com/page3/page2/page2.html>), where you point out the connection between early jazz and free jazz – both aspects of the music that tend to get rather overlooked by the jazz mainstream, fads like the Dixieland revival bands aside. Perhaps you could expand on this connection.

GC: I’ve touched on this above and if I may I’ll include the next point you raise: *In that IAJE discussion, you argue that we must get students “to realise that there is a continuum in the*

music.” In addition, your website is called Jazz continuum – this idea of an ongoing heritage is clearly important to you. I wonder if you could expand on this.

The connection is the regard for the individual, which in a way got forgotten about in the bebop period as everyone tried to play like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and was also forgotten about in the swing big bands where a trumpet-player is a trumpet-player. Two paraphrases from quotes in the book. Bob Brookmeyer speaks of people such as Roy Eldridge virtually going out of business when bebop took over, and Fred Stone, speaks of Ellington hiring individuals, not someone just to fill a trumpet chair. Ellington often carried two drummers or two bassists because he liked their playing and wanted them in the band. Which is very much the way that the free jazz groups operate. As jazz musicians we need to recognise that it’s a music made up (pun almost intended) by a group of individuals, who in their playing touch us in a magical way, but who, in the best groups, are able to put their egos aside and make themselves into a well-functioning group.



Graham Collier with trumpeter Harry Beckett.

DG: One final question arising from the IAJE discussion. You say that “collective improvisation [...] has come back into jazz from the early days, but that is still not properly recognized.” This mention of collective improvisation struck me as particularly interesting in relation to your own big band work. There’s a sense that the whole band is involved – while a particular musician, probably a reed player, will be standing up front and taking the main solo, taking the applause, what’s just as important as this individual display is the interaction between the soloist and the rhythm section, who, through what you call ‘textural improvisation,’ provide a flexible and supportive base. This relation between the individual and the collective is something George Lewis has talked about in his recent book on the AACM in Chicago, and, throughout jazz history, there seems to have been a complex relation between the two modes. Returning to the idea of the big band, Ellington wrote for individuals (Johnny Hodges, Cootie Williams, Sam Nanton), yet the band had a collective sound as well which to some extent could be said to transcend individuality. After this very roundabout introduction, I’ll finally get to the point: what are your views on the relation between the individual and the collective in jazz tradition, and in your own work?

GC: I think I’ve covered this in some of the answers above, but I could add that one of my eureka moments was discovering that there are three kinds of improvising in jazz. Not that it’s a new concept, it’s in jazz throughout its history, but it’s rarely recognized as such and acted upon in the way people write and create jazz. Realising this and articulating it was a big break

through for me.

The three kinds are the solo, when someone stands up in front and improvises. The second is what, as you say above, I call textural improvising – what the rhythm section do, what a good jazz singer does: in simple terms, play around with the time, with the melody. I've applied that to band backings where instead of playing parts specifically written for them I ask them to improvise around a chord sequence, or with a given motif. I was praised for being a good orchestrator in one track on the *Winter Oranges* CD but, as the liner notes said, and another version of the tune proved, I simply supplied a method and the musicians ran with it. In some ways I'm beginning to think this is why I'm misunderstood by many critics, who think, following precedents, that it's all written down. If they were to see a concert of mine – or listen to alternate versions of the same track – they would see how it works, like the woman who said that I was 'directing 14 Jackson Pollocks', or the musician in Canada who said he 'felt like a colour in a paint box'.

The third kind of improvising (after that rant) is structural improvising, what happens in a jam session where nothing is predetermined. I've applied that to large-scale pieces such as *The Third Colour* and *The Vonetta Factor*. (The latter, and an alternate version of the first, will be out on a double CD next year, to coincide with the publication of the jazz composer book.)

DG: Finally, what are your plans for the future?

GC: To try to keep busy, and to try to make my ideas about jazz better known. Which is one reason for doing this interview, and for expanding my websites. And to enjoy the view from my study in Greece while reading Lowry or listening to Ellington!



Graham Collier's websites are:

<http://www.grahamcolliermusic.com>, which includes news, biog and a page with MSS and audio from each of the recordings.

<http://www.jazzcontinuum.com>, a blog, with some earlier writings and some recommendations of who I like and what to listen to.

<http://www.thejazzcomposer.com>, a teaser for the book, containing the synopsis and chapter breakdown, with space for expansion once the book is published and reviewed.

YOUTUBE WATCH

Charles Mingus Quintet – ‘Flowers for a Lady’

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkTEfrmqxws>



There are a number of fine Mingus videos available on the internet, including a complete 1964 concert from Oslo featuring Byard, Dolphy, Curson, and Jordan: a band which was arguably one of his finest (witness the recently re-issued Cornell Concert, or the superb ‘Mingus at Antibes’, with Bud Powell’s lovely guest appearance on ‘I’ll Remember April’, of which a very grainy video also exists). With this video, though, we’ve moved forward 10 years, towards a more critically under-appreciated period in the great man’s career. Recorded at the Umbria Jazz Festival in 1974, ‘Flowers for a Lady’ really shows the strengths of Mingus’ 70s groups. Saxophonists Adams and Bluiett are at their barnstorming best, and the whole band deliver a series of solos not so much tempestuous as beside themselves with joy: the expected passionate engagement from George Adams (complete with a brief ‘Surrey With a Fringe on Top’ reference), a be-hatted Don Pullen dancing in the doorway between the inside and the outside with his usual ease, and, to top it all, Hamiet Bluiett (also be-hatted) blowing well up into soprano range and making the hefty baritone scream for all its worth. Gerry Mulligan this ain’t. A nonchalant looking Mingus keeps it all swinging alongside the ever-reliable Dannie Richmond. The piece has an irrepressible energy and verve about it, a magnanimity of spirit that was always there in Mingus’ music. Did I mention that it was also tremendously exciting? Go click, go watch.



Kaoru Abe Solo

Live at Fukushima, 24/9/1977 -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCqlI75xdfo>

Jûsan-nin renzoku bôkôma (excerpt) -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6gyIHldJyg>

There are a couple of videos here. The first one is a live recording: Abe in what looks like a pretty confined space, standing in front of an upright piano with the front taken off (at one point he steps backwards and inadvertently touches one of the keys). Moving on a lyrical, subdued basis here – tender and quiet melodies, trills, swells, repetitions occasionally rising to altissimo

squeals. Perhaps the whole concert was recorded: the video ends by cutting to a group of people who are listening to the clip in a TV studio.

Upon digging, it turns out that the second clip is actually from a horror film called directed by maverick Japanese film-maker Koji Wakamatsu. Wakamatsu specialized in ‘the pink film’ (pinku eiga), a 60s/70s ‘genre’ which married softcore porn with radical politics. A particularly notable example, ‘Ecstasy of the Angels’ (1972), features a performance by the Yosuke Yamashita trio: footage of the musicians playing is intercut with a rape/ orgasm and anarchist bombing activities. Wakamatsu also directed ‘Endless Waltz’ (1995), a film about Abe’s life described by Jonathan Crow as a “Sid and Nancy for the free jazz generation.” The Abe clip is from ‘Jūsan-nin renzoku bōkōma’ (1978), a title which translates as ‘The Violent Man Who Attacked 13 People’: a dispassionate, clinical description reflected in the film’s English title, ‘Serial Rapist.’ I haven’t seen the film, and I’m not sure I could stomach it, from the reviews I’ve read – in any case, it’s pretty obscure and doesn’t seem to be readily available. Here’s a sample: “this has to be one of the most nihilistic violent pink movies I have ever seen. Its tone is utterly bleak and hopeless and the scenes of murder, rape and sexual violence are uncompromising. The film chronicles few days of life of cycling serial rapist and murderer. The howling saxophone of Kaoru Abe replaced the voice of the young killer-rapist bringing an inventive contrast to the dumbness of the young man. The loneliness of his lost character is simply overwhelming. The film is cold, bitter and full of despair.”

It’s hard to view the clip in the same way when one realizes that the titular character is the man with the motorbike who wanders into shot about thirty seconds after Abe’s started playing. Still, it’s wonderful to see Abe playing out in the open – so often (as you can see from the other video) this music is confined to dingy little clubs and back-rooms, when one feels that in some ways the open air is the perfect space for its emotional range – space to breathe. I find it an incredibly evocative clip – not so much for evoking a particular time or place, for re-creating the moment of filming, but for all those imaginative spaces which it brings into existence with such ease.

Barkingside at Mopomoso

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=0iyLnk9XEEc>



Filmed by the estimable Helen Petts at the Vortex Jazz Club: the quartet, Barkingside (Alex Ward, Alex Hawkins, Dom Lash, Paul May), the occasion, a Mopomoso Evening in July 2008. This clip is so absolutely beautiful, if beauty has that absolute sense which this music affirms and denies then it can go on being itself and only then actually breathe. It is real, and true in the moment(s); fairy-dust is liberally applied and runs off because it is really air, flowing through and out of Alex Ward’s clarinet note-throw in motor frenzy with pianistic key-chase. Fairy-dust

could scare, easily: and the real magic is when the group's muscle falls away to Paul May's percussion, solo, as he concentrates on one sound, not even 'drumming', stick-scratching against cymbal-holder's rough handle, a scrape-growl howl of purest quiet loneliness and concord; then introduces his second hand, as air-hockey mallet surface-skimming, rubbing on snare and hitting the sides as the accident that becomes texture's crucial layer; clarinet mouth-moan and so unexpected in little sounds' forest, piano assumes the air of lush romanticism, chords to break hearts, until the first phrase digests and you realize it's acerbic lyric, it's love-song as grave as the most delicate morbid imaginings, a death-ode, desolate as Tristano's Requiem. May's solo is about control as leads to most abandon; is one sound, or two, so obsessive rather than every-inch flailed in search of the racket...Self-limitation is self-license if you issue out the permits, to yourself. Restraint and discipline not as the patriarchy hands down but yourself from study and feel and mind. Maybe that's what Sun Ra could have meant.

Peter Brötzmann, Ken Vandermark & Paal Nilssen-Love – Tokyo, 27/09/2008

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSI4mHyfNZA>



Non-fury, or melancholy, as it manifests itself in Brötzmann's current work, is so often described as 'lyricism' in journalists' reviews, my own included: *mea culpa*. That is not right because it implies a clinging to words (the child grasps the mother tongue) which I would have thought was precisely *not* what is being done in musical free improvisation. But it is also not right because too often it is seized on as Brötzmann 'varying' himself – a 'welcome touch of lyricism' to off-set all that sound and fury, signifying nothing. And then, perhaps, his music as variegated plant, his persona as chimera, bearded and gruff but souled. If you screech too long people forget what you screech about and you are emptied. I don't believe this. The dying animal does not decide that its first howl was enough to express its pain and then fall silent. Yet the following is a seductive concept: 'lyricism' as the re-affirmation of meaning after the force of expression has emptied itself out, has carried itself on for too long. Probably one thinks of this impulse, this 'lyricism', not as the salve to the wound that led to the screech, but as its more muted whimper, its exhausted expression reconfiguring into a new authority. Perhaps there is something in that – but that whimpering does not necessarily equal quality, or if it does that is because it has captured something beyond our words' delimiting. For, yes, we do delimit: whatever our intentions, we are marking out our territory in something (a music) that belongs to us (though not as possession in the sense of paid ownership). Because it is our possession in that way – a possession free and shared, genuinely Common in a most uncommon manner – our lack

of care towards it is so much injustice. Because of us, the openings are closed-off; at least, we close them off to ourselves, but you can squeeze through without a 'key' (that would just break in the lock) if you push your listening back on itself.

'Lyricism' is not the right term because the music exists in a too-delicate balance that won't, or can't, shudder that readily to song – to song, that is, understood as stricture (whether that understanding is intended or not). This melody posed on breath, treading the wavering line, eggs itself on into life at that moment where life is most aware of its fragility. Perhaps not even the musicians, or not all of the musicians, are aware of that, it is more a function of the *music* that in flowing out of them will not freeze on the air they make sing, that allows them to sing, that place of shaping, a sincerity of environment: environs meant as much as Brötzmann or Vandermark mean, or don't mean what they don't quite sing or say: instrumental, the point pivots the most terrible notions round its axis, Brötzmann's machine gun firing no rounds, laid aside or converted to a stung remembrance of its non-melody, its chatter and bellow. Vandermark's saxophone is the most eerie accompanying, tracing itself out of, or as, a dampened bassoon - and the fact that he's not seen in the video makes him even more the ghost-presence of Brötzmann's clarinet.

For yes, there are ghosts here, and even if they are not Ayler's ditty, they are certainly the ever-present howl of absence that was at the centre of his terrified energies, life at its strongest at moment of most weakness, the best Brötzmann I see at his most vulnerable, for at that time I see all of him become all of us, and none of these things.

Nilsson-Love: the drums' martial residue; their 'new music' patina; the flutter of the heart, the hearth that calls from home in a music that makes its own un-returnable home. A temporary resting place, even a place of dwelling for as long as it is being built. Then the wolf's applause will huff and will puff and will blow down the breath still hanging, disperse the notes still ringing through charged air. Electricity turns negative, now the performance can be reproduced in photographs but that negative itself will always be inadequate in its fixed glimpse. Thus too the video, the moving images. But perhaps there is a haunting there not even present at the live performance; one set of ghosts replaced for another. This can re-create itself every time we say goodbye to our tired notions in this music of utmost exhausted insistence, this priceless value.

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- Cornelius Cardew

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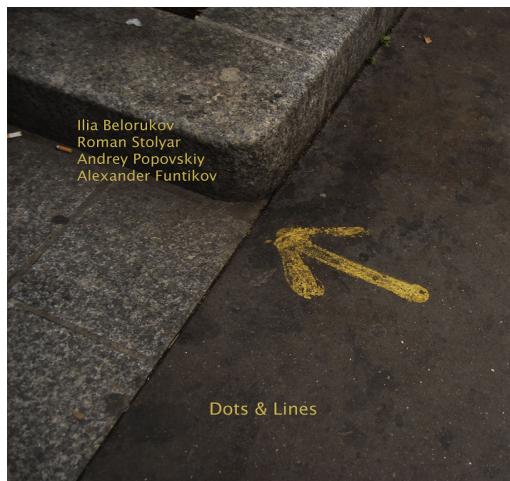
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ILIA BEGORUKOV/ ROMAN STOLYAR/ ANDREY POPOVSKIY/ ALEXANDER FUNTIKOV – *DOTS AND LINES*



Label: Ermantell Records

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Allegro espressivo; Interlude 1; Adagio cantabile; Interlude II; Scherzo; Interlude III; Finale. Poco morendo,

Personnel: Ilia Belorukov – alto & baritone sax; Roman Stolyar – piano, melodica, soprano & alto recorders; Andre Popovskiy – acoustic guitar, deychk-pondr; Alexander Funtikov – trumpet, ocarina, flute, percussion.

It's extremely refreshing to hear music this good coming from somewhere outside the UK-USA axis that so often predominates in coverage of free jazz/improv. Of the players on this album, saxophonist Ilia Belorukov is the only one I was aware of previously. As documented on a slew of recent CD-R and internet releases, Belorukov is a great talent, giving his all whenever he plays, in contexts varying from the free-jazz/rock stylings of 'Wozzeck' to the more inquisitive pokings and scratchings of the 'Totalitarian Music Sect' (their album 'Warm Things Vol. 2' was reviewed in the previous issue of eartrip). His presence alone seems to guarantee that something interesting will result, and his collaborators on this album are also well up to the mark.

The album takes its name from a passage of Wassily Kandinsky, quoted on the back of the album sleeve. Kandinsky defines the roles of 'dots and lines': a dot is a rest and a line is "internally mobile tension". Through these two figures, the artist can create a series of connections and 'crossings' which result in an internal language, at times deliberately obscured by obvious 'obstacles'. Could that be said to describe what goes on in the music?

For me, it seems to invite a more linear approach than Kandinsky's large compositional fields, but, despite the specificity of his artistic prescriptions, I doubt the musicians envisage anything so schematic anyway. Kandinsky or no Kandinsky, it's an unusual listen, particularly for the instrumentation and the way this constantly shifts: none of the four players stick to just one instrument.

'Allegro Espressivo', the disc opener, starts out as a particularly dark-sounding piece of free jazz brawn (Belorukov blowing baritone sax over Stolyar's pounding piano), but the sounds descend into something more elusive, everyone switching instruments and gliding into a more meshed texture, a oneness. Four minutes in and Stolyar is playing left-hand piano figures full of tension, leaving spaces in between to be filled by slow drifting sax and muffled yelping trumpet, with the scrapings of (presumably) Andrey Popovskiy's deychk-pondr. An intriguing instrument, it comes across, in Popovskiy's hands, as somewhere between a guitar and a stringed percussion instrument. Thus, we have a sound that can occupy at once the scratchy high registers of a Barry Guy or John Edwards (and thus occupy the function of the date's absent double bass), while also gravitating towards the role of a 'front-line' instrument.

Ilia Belorukov's playing in other contexts tends to be in a free jazz mould (though he is nothing if not diverse). Here, the music tends to have more of the spaces associated with free improve; the tension and complex texture building and twittering rather than the all-out no-holds-barred screamfest. Check 'Interlude 1' for the delicious way the saxophone's held-in breath barfs (at one point bursting out to a cut-short scream) prevent release, before the guitar, suddenly, seamlessly, finds its way into a series of Tal Farlow-style jazz chords, over which hangs singing sax, and the performance ends with a period of silence.

'Adagio Cantabile' finds Stolyar's sustain-pedal giving his mysterious harmonic investigations an aural halo, a shine and shimmer to the sound that only enhances its ghostliness,

sax and guitar stretching their melodic spirals over the constantly, gently motoring piano line in worried languor.

The second interlude is again a duet, Stolyar now on recorder, with Popovskiy on guitar. The piece swirls round the atmosphere of folk-tunes, alternating between more melodic passages where recorder shrills out over undulating guitar strums, and passages of chattering breathiness and spiky guitar.

‘Scherzo’ is far from rumbustious, beginning with inside-piano and low-toned guitar rummaging, with barfs from the saxophone functioning more as rhythmic disturber than ‘lead instrument’. Stolyar’s move from strings to keys brings in Belorukov for more linear playing (on baritone), and the music becomes more skittish, filled with the tension that characterises this disc, but with a dancing quality to it. Soon, however, the dancing turns lumpen and heavy, baritone and piano in a Bartokian motor-run which drowns under its own momentum as the music slides into Belorukov blowing over a watery piano backdrop, still constantly-sounding but this time more flowing, ending as the last few sounds hang by a thread over impending silence.

The third and final interlude finds the baritone sax intent on unfolding a slow, linear discourse, at first supported by Stolyar’s swelling melodica note hums, then resisted, with fierce squeaks. Stolyar moves to piano, again insisting on sprightly rhythmic figures that break up the sax’s course, as they both once more stride into the area of jazz/Bartok-tinged motorism; Belorukov changes tack, to chattering high yawping, while Stolyar pounds out a serious parody of *sturm und drang* romanticism. Melody drifts back even while the piano’s rumble still dies away, Belorukov returning to the opening course, chastened, ending just at the right point on a melodica phrase that sounds initially playful, but mocking when it stops.

The final piece on the disc begins with saxophone screech-hold over (once more) the dying rumble of piano chords, then moves down the ‘mysterioso’ line with some odd, trembling ‘Clangers’ sounds on ocarina – just one example of the group’s desire to maintain a consistent variety, to make the unusual (but by no means spuriously ‘weird’ or ‘kooky’) their domain, even their *raison d’être*.

Overall, despite the formal constraints implied by the naming of individual tracks after classical tempo markings (Allegro; Scherzo; Adagio, etc), the music has a definite freedom about it, roaming over much emotional and colouristic territory, but with something avowedly introspective underlying even the most energetic passages. Watch out for more from these young players in the near future, which for them should be bright indeed.

(Review by David Grundy)

TONY BEVAN/ CHRIS CORSANO/ DOMINIC LASH – MONSTER CLUB



Label: Foghorn Records

Release Date: December 2008

Tracklist: I think that’ll be ok....; Monster Club; This is Murder; You’re telling me!

Personnel: Tony Bevan: soprano, tenor & bass saxophones; Chris Corsano: drums and percussion; Dominic Lash: double bass .

Additional Information: Recorded live at “The Wheatsheaf”, Oxford, England by Chris Trent on the 6th July 2008. CD available from the Foghorn Records site, at <http://www.foghornrecords.co.uk/>.

Brief mention only for this, as it was recorded at a gig on which I gave a fairly detailed report last issue. Not that I want to imply that gig and album are interchangeable – of course there’s a subtle difference (at times I think the CD sounds even more intense than the gig itself!), and this could be the space to comment on the disparities between live performances and recordings, which is still a big area of debate. It *could* be the space, but maybe it’s not, not without due consideration of all the salient points and details and points of view. As things stand, then, the intense trio gig I witnessed six months ago has now become the CD I have in my hands.

The audience for the ‘product’ will presumably be much bigger than for the live flesh moment of creation, which is a shame, if you look at it a certain way – but maybe that’s just a fact we can’t afford to get all mopey about– ‘comment c’est.’

What about the music? The gig represented the first encounter for this particular trio, and retains the freshness of that, while perhaps sacrificing a certain tightness which a little more fine-tuning, through subsequent performances, could have created. Reservations aside, there are plenty of fine things to listen out for, but I’m going to resist the temptation to tell you what they are (though I will note that Bevan’s soprano is extremely direct and forceful on the 2-minute opening track, giving the disc an immediately arresting impact). Yes, folks, this may be a monster’s club, but the beasts within are well able to speak for themselves, and with some eloquence. Dig what they have to say.

(Review by David Grundy)

CARLA BLEY & HER REMARKABLE BIG BAND – *APPEARING NIGHTLY*



Label: WATT

Release Date: September 2008

Tracklist: Greasy Gravy; Awful Coffee; Appearing Nightly At The Black Orchid; Someone To Watch; I Hadn't Anyone Till You.

Personnel: Earl Gardner: trumpet; Lew Soloff: trumpet; Florian Esch: trumpet; Beppe Calamosca: trombone; Gary Valente: trombone; Gigi Grata: trombone; Richard Henry: trombone; Roger Jannotta: alto saxophone, flute; Wolfgang Puschnig: alto saxophone, flute; Andy Sheppard: tenor saxophone; Christophe Panzani: tenor saxophone; Julian Argüelles: baritone saxophone; Carla Bley: piano, conductor; Karen Mantler: organ; Steve Swallow: bass; Billy Drummond: drums.

This disc consists of much of the repertoire played at the Vienne Jazz Festival in 2006 when Carla Bley’s big band was one of the highlights of that year’s event. It is great to now hear this music again, this time recorded in the New Morning Club in Paris. The only disappointment is that the re-arrangement of material from her epic “Escalator over the hill” that formed a substantial percentage of the set hasn’t made it to this release. However, this is not to distract from a very good CD indeed.

As the cover and liner illustrations clearly suggest, this record plugs in more than any other of her releases into the earlier traditions of big band jazz. As a consequence, this has to be one of her strongest efforts with a larger ensemble. This is not to say that this record is anything but contemporary, but although all but the arrangement of Ray Noble’s “I hadn’t anyone till you” are originals, there is a knowing wink and nod to material from the Swing Era. Indeed, the wonderful “Greasy Gravy” (a feature for Wolfgang Pushchnig’s alto) ends on a quote from Tony Jackson’s “Pretty Baby” that some may recognise from the Jelly Roll Morton Library of Congress recordings and was a hit in the teens of the last century. In fact, the alluding of other compositions is very much a feature of this album, the “Appearing Nightly at the Black Orchid” suite is an attempt to depict a mythical jazz club from yesteryear and opens with Bley’s piano quoting “My foolish heart”, “Night & Day” and “Here’s that rainy day” before a quote from Monk’s version of “Sweet and lovely” introduces Steve Swallow’s bass and, ultimately, the rest of the band. As opposed to being hackneyed, this is executed with Carla’s typical sense of irony and the composition eventually develops into a minor key with the theme picked up by Gary Valente’s trombone, sounding like a refugee from a much earlier Duke Ellington band. Throughout the record, the Steve Swallow and Billy Drummond provide a wonderfully sprung rhythm section with Karen Mantler’s organ occasionally adding a bit of extra colour. As usual, Lew Soloff handles all the trumpet solos.

Elsewhere, “Awful coffee” is a brisk bop-ish theme and opens with a baritone solo by Julian Argüelles. The writing for the brass in this arrangement is edgy and dissonant, recalling somewhat the Dizzy Gillespie orchestra of the late forties. A harmonically distorted quote from

“Tea for two” appears as a riff behind Andy Sheppard’s tenor before culminating on an eccentric combination of “Salt peanuts”, “You’re the cream in my coffee”, “Watermelon man” and “Hey, Pete, let’s eat mo’ meat” that somehow manages to sound entirely natural. The penultimate track, “Someone to watch” starts off with more tenor from Andy Sheppard under-pinned by Steve Swallows springy bass lines and once again comparisons with earlier vintages of jazz writing are apparent. Puschnig also gets a chance to stretch out on what seems like a contrafact - no prizes for guessing which upon tune though. To conclude, Carla Bley has arranged “I hadn’t anyone to you” but much of the theme is paraphrased in her unique style and the writing so idiosyncratic that this is, to all intents and purposes, very much her own work. This track epitomises her skill at creating something wholly original and interesting whilst working within a tried and tested milieu.

All told, Carla Bley may have come a long way since the late 60’s and early 70’s when she seemed to be at the very cutting edge of jazz but a record such as “Appearing Nightly” demonstrates just how she has matured to become one of the most readily recognisable voices in the history of big band writing. That she now seems capable of equally satisfying the curiosity of more adventurous listeners and those from a more orthodox big band tradition simultaneously is testament to her talent as a composer. This is a hugely enjoyable record and I have no reservations about thoroughly recommending it.

(Review by Ian Thumwood)

CADAVRE ESQUIS – *IMPERFECT SILENCE: CADAVRE ESQUIS COMPILATION 1*



Label: Whi-Music

Tracklist: Imperfect Silence

Personnel: Gosia Bazinska, Barry Chabala, Paolo Cruciani, Bruno Duplant, David Grundy, phil hargreaves, Bret Hart, Massimo Magee, Lee Noyes, Matt Sekel, Glenn Smith, Glenn Weyant

Additional Information: Access the Cadavre Esquis project at <http://www.cadavreesquis.whi-music.co.uk/>. Download the album from <http://www.imperfectsilence.whi-music.co.uk/>.

Once again, Mr Phil Hargreaves has come up with an ingenious and intriguing idea for a musical project, dealing with ideas of communication in the information age and more besides. I think he's best placed to introduce this record, so I'll leave the first two paragraphs of this review to him: "Cadavre Esquis is an online collaboration of musicians from the online community. Here are the rules of the game: A track is seeded by a musician providing a starting track. Someone else will then download that track, add a further layer and then post the result. Overlayers are not confined to the most recent track, and can reach back into the history of the track to fork it."

"Born out of the discussion site freejazz.org, nearly 1Gb of MP3 files (and a number of other postal and real-life collaborations). This disk pulls together some of those moments: not a 'greatest hits' or even a 'finest moments', it's merely my personal journey through the material that is there."

Cadavre Esquis, as readers I'm sure will know, was a Surrealist technique, somewhat similar to the parlour-game 'Consequences', in which single segments (a drawing, a word, a phrase) from individuals are put together to make a strange new creation. Indeed, it's not unprecedented for this to be applied to music, with composers including Virgil Thomson, John Cage and Lou Harrison apparently collaborating on 'Exquisite Corpse' pieces, where each composer would only be privy to one measure of music. Of course, things become easier when dealing with improvised music, which one might argue goes through something of the same process in its 'normal' form; where one has to second-guess, to react instantaneously to the sudden appearance of fresh and surprising material with whatever mental and physical resources are to hand at that particular moment.

The dangers that arise from such situations are perhaps, for many musicians, their principal joys –failure could be embraced as success, change and mutability as fundamental facts and thus not to be decried from a stood-still position. 'Imperfect Silence' (flawed noise?) suggests such failure. There are certainly plenty of strange overlapping sounds here, the joins sometimes showing awkwardly (read: interestingly). I very much doubt that any of the material here is as its creators originally envisioned it, for things are at a further remove on the CD than even on the website, as Hargreaves is keen to stress that this is his "personal experience" of the material – but it never feels as though he's acting as composer, shaping the work of others into his own vision. Instead, he's more like the curator of this living museum, allowing the sonic exhibits to merge into each other: 'remixing' them, if you will. As someone who's had some involvement with the Cadavre Esquis project myself (and as any visitor to the website could tell you), what's started off with often becomes completely transformed once several new layers have been added. Electronics will warp, new instruments will reveal and add different shadings and contrasts, to original pieces: the subjective intentions of individual soloists are submerged into a kind of odd collectivity, a miasma of soloistic off-unison.

Given the diversity of the line-up, it's not surprise that there's a wide variety of playing styles – in the first piece, the more avant-improv you might expect (squawking sopranos, hard-toned tenors, exploratory trumpet) exists alongside a whimsical vocal reminiscent of Bjork, and, at times, the acoustic and electric guitar material that drifts in and out (probably that of Barry Chabala, though Hargreaves has left open the question of who's playing what, when, ambiguous) adds a lyrical, dreamy, almost nostalgic touch.

Quite a few different pieces seem to have coalesced into one during this opening portion of the disc, to provide a 25-minute suite. Track two is longer: several seconds of silence, and we begin again with trumpet and sax over boxy percussion, twanging spirals of acoustic guitar, and a bass providing an underlying pulse that sets no limits because it exists on a different level to the furious activity overhead, and thus adds a fruitful tension - it's felt more as a contradictory pulse than as dictatorial beat. At some point, the bass imperceptibly merges into an electronic drone, the trumpet becoming mournful and introverted and electronics rising in pitch and intensity as a new piece emerges, chunky bowed cello in duet with guitar, with a queasy electronic backdrop; a distant, echoing piano joins the fray. The electronics start to feel more and

more haunted, ghostly, clashing with and questioning the guitars' impersonation of finger-picking virtuosity and the cello's exploration of the slow wail and grave sonorities of Modern Classical (for want of a better generic tag).

In another truly masterful transition, raucous trumpet and sax come in for another of those moments where perception of which instrument melts and sound alone is what there is – as the ear starts to pick out what's going on, this time it's free jazz over an electronic layer (involving backwards sounds, perhaps a remix of existent material) – there also seems to be walking bass somewhere down in the lower reaches of the music, creating the same uneasy familiarity as the previous guitar. And suddenly we're back to the vocals with which we opened the disc, on a parallel lyrical flight with trumpet, guitar plucking a gentle pathway underneath. Words start to drift in... “Even in his youth he was afraid...wrapped in a cloth and protected.” Playing with the words, with notes, with the silences that surround the halting song. Moments of fragile delicacy that would seem out of place, conceptually, if they didn't fit in so well with the album's flow.

Radio voices bring things back to the exploratory terror, growling bass clarinet and plucked cello. Drums will play a part in this next, almost acerbic, exploration, too. Then a spoken voice, English-accented; one imagines the speaker exhibiting the same kind of actorish, sinister demeanor as Vincent Price. “I would like, if I may, to take you on a strange journey... From the day he was born, he was troubled.” The words connect to the song from before, but this time it's the cue for a strange instrumental march, trilling recorder fading in and out of the textural forefront, a fairground rhythm, barely audible, adding an air of perceptible menace. Rhythm is abandoned for a slow, grinding electronic background wash, all sorts of sounds emerging from within: slowed-down and backwards fragments of voices, snivelling laughter, whooshes, whispers, like escaping steam.

Words again: “from the day that I was born.” If there are themes here, they emerge organically from the collective consciousness. Bad beginnings. Portents of doom, nevertheless exerting a powerful pull on helpless victims. “I just had to see it. I just had to see it.” Curiosity killed the cat. The texture thins as recorder comes back in, then voices build up and it's the pulling, chugging cello, tenor sax over the increasingly splintered and fractured electronic backdrop, before things, fairly quickly, grind to a halt. One more voice has the last word: “Well you never can tell...perfect sounds.” The semantic ambiguity typical of the enterprises' collective creative chaos.

And so I could round things off nicely with that favourite reviewer's trick, the rhetorical question: how else could it end, but in such an appropriate manner? And then of course I would have to pull myself up by realising that it could in end in about a million other, different ways....

(Review by David Grundy)

BILL DIXON – 17 MUSICIANS IN SEARCH OF A SOUND: DARFUR

Label: AUM Fidelity

Release Date: June 2008

Tracklist: Prelude; Intrados; In Search Of A Sound; Contour One; Contour Two; Scattering Of The Following; Darfur; Contour Three; Sinopia; Pentimento I; Pentimento II; Pentimento III; Pentimento IV

Personnel: Bill Dixon: trumpet, composer, conductor; Graham Haynes: cornet, flugelhorn; Stephen Haynescornet, flugelhorn; Taylor Ho Bynum: cornet, flugelhorn; Dick Griffin: tenor trombone; Steve Swell: tenor trombone; Joseph Daly: tuba; Karen Borca: bassoon; Will Connell: bass clarinet; Michel Cote: Bb contrabass clarinet; Andrew Raffo Dewar: soprano sax; John Hagen: tenor sax, baritone sax; J.D.Parran: bass saxophone, bamboo flute; Glynis Loman: cello; Andrew Lafkas: bass; Jackson Krall: drums, percussion; Warren Smith: vibes, timpani, drums.

Additional Information: Recorded live on June 20th, 2007, at Vision Festival XII, New York City.

BILL DIXON

17 Musicians in Search of a Sound: Darfur



In Concert at Vision Festival XII

Dixon's discography is sparse, and consists mainly of stripped-down settings, such as the solo 'Odyssey' box set or duets with Tony Oxley; '17 Musicians in Search of a Sound', then, is a welcome chance to hear his orchestral conception on a wider stage (last year's fine disc with the Exploding Star Orchestra found him in an orchestral setting, to be sure, but as guest rather than leader). I say 'orchestral conception' because, throughout his career, Dixon's control of colour, dynamics and timbre has shown a concern with a particular richness and range of structure and texture: in a sense, Dixon has always thought in orchestral terms, even when playing alone.

For me, probably more so than in previous recordings, '17 Musicians' is not really 'jazz' per se (though of course avant-jazz sensibilities are manifested in the improvised solos by the likes of Taylor Ho Bynum). For one thing, there's no 'rhythm section' - you're more likely to hear tympani or vibraphone than a drum set - and the pace is often slow, with massive blocks of sound looming up into crescendos in a way that reminds me of the approaching monolith in Kubrick's '2001'.

The mood is generally quite bleak, as befits the 'Darfur' appendage, although there appear to be no specific political/programmatic elements to the work. The first few pieces concentrate on composed material, with solo voices occasionally emerging to make pithy statements. Particularly powerful are 'Contour Three' and 'Darfur'. These lead up to the central movement, 'Sinopia', a near 25-minute work which contains the most impressive music on the disk, rising to massive climaxes in which multiple soloing has tremendous visceral force (yet still, perhaps because of the context, with a different feel to the free jazz 'freakout' that is its nearest aural cousin). Check out the three trumpets blowing separate lines, with Karen Borca's bassoon snaking around underneath. It's great to hear Borca get a chance to shine – though best known for playing with husband Jimmy Lyons and on a few Cecil Taylor sides back in the 80s, she is, for my money, one of the most interesting voices around, on any instrument, mingling a slightly rough lyricism with a piercing sense of investigation into possibilities and pathways in sound.

After 'Sinopia', a wind-down of a sort: four short 'Pentimentos' – a term borrowed from the terminology of visual art (one of Dixon's impressive abstract acrylic-on-paper paintings takes its place on the front cover), referring to an artists' layering of a new painting over an original, abandoned conception. Thus, these pieces reprise the 'monoliths' of the opening movements,

changed not so much in terms of the sounds in themselves, but by the cataclysmic context of following 'Sinopia': reflection following the storm. Though Dixon as a trumpet player is generally subsumed into the ensemble, with soloing left in the capable hands of the other band members, this is undoubtedly his conception through and through - the work of a major composer. (Review by David Grundy)

PAUL FLAHERTY/RANDALL COLBOURNE – *BRIDGE OUT!*



BRIDGE OUT!

PAUL FLAHERTY
RANDALL COLBOURNE

Label: Family Vineyard **Release Date:** June 2008

Tracklist: Scorched Onslaught; Marauding Toxic Fungus; Ice Spike; Rhubarb; Gilded Plague; Thirsty Thorns; More Lasting than Bronze; Spiders In Her Hair

Personnel: Paul Flaherty: alto and tenor sax; Randall Colbourne: drums.

‘Bridge Out’ – “You play the bridge and take it out” – a title scoffing at any such formalistic concerns as the duo travel by means of improvisational freedom instead, ignoring the bridge’s easy route over the gorge of musical danger. That’s one way of taking it, anyway; ‘lyricism’ means a lot in this context, a hell of a lot, but more as a particular way of *feeling*, an echo or ghost in Flaherty’s voice, the sense of wounded-in-face-of-the-world despair – more this than the structural concerns that ‘lyric’ would imply, as we trade in ‘song’ for ‘scream’.

Things begin with the eight minutes of ‘Scorched Onslaught’: the familiar application of war metaphors to free jazz which I find at once appropriate and troubling – lurking behind it a kind of rather unsavoury machismo, the idea of the (invariably male) saxophonist’s gun-weapon (the free jazz equivalent of cock-rock). There are political implications, obviously (which is what made me think of the ‘gun’ idea in the first place – Shepp’s famous idea about using his sax as a

machine-gun for the Vitecong) – and in that sense the title ‘freedom fighter’ would be extremely appropriate.

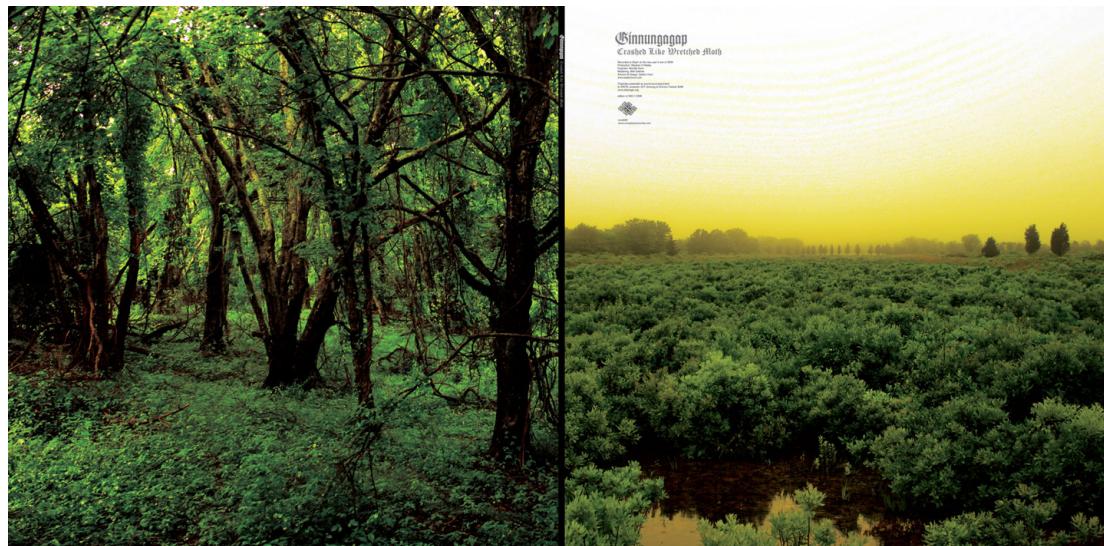
In this particular case, anyway, the idea of war and conflict is most definitely being deplored: an evocation of horror rather than a call to arms. Flaherty is off into extreme altissimo register within the first thirty seconds, and what is impressive is not just that he does this (many do, in this field) but how long he stays doing it – he will sustain a note of extremely high pitch for quite a while. So it is in ‘Scorched Onslaught’; he holds a note, and Colbourne’s drums seem to gain an extra bass boost, to become more sonorous than the ‘melody instrument’ they ‘accompany’. And then once sax has swooped down for lowbarks, unexpectedly a solo. Mid to low register, then vocals (a sort of humming) underlining (or smearing) the line and the sounds of struck sax-keys giving all a bodily thrust, an intimacy. If this was a movie, imagine the camera to pull in from its wide-angle shots of widespread devastation to focus on a human instance, a human detail, then to pull out again as Colbourne’s drums thrust Flaherty back to scream-woof-land.

I think Flaherty may be the most despairing player in free jazz. Whereas Brotzmann gives off a sense of sheer energy that is as much exciting as draining (and there’s that slightly manic sense of humour as well, particularly when he’s playing with Bennink), while Ayler and Frank Wright may come from a folk-tradition of African-American joyshouts, and Zorn has an anarchic spirit unlikely to remain too long mired in despair, the places Flaherty goes are much darker. Perhaps most nakedly on ‘Whirl of Nothingness’, he is, to borrow the title of a track from the Archie Shepp/Philly Joe Jones duo record, ‘Howling in the Silence’.

In that sense, Colbourne’s presence is perhaps necessary to ease the torment, as something with which to measure the dose (even though he also seems to be driving Flaherty on). The drummer’s playing always has a sterner, less desperate feel, a sense of ritual, and as on the solo from ‘Marauding Toxic Fungus’, a momentum and rolling pace which pursues a different trajectory to Flaherty’s essentially static wails. That said, the bowed cymbals of the short solo ‘Ice Spike’ are as grinding and direct as Flaherty’s upper register, frequencies to set the teeth on edge. Colbourne is by all means along for the ride.

But I’d venture to suggest that the most despairing parts are often those which seem the most melodic, the most ‘lyrical’ – their desolation, their essential *un-adornment* that necessarily arises at the moment of realisation: that you have no place to go. Where do all the multiphonics and flying fingers and flying wails, hoarse barks lead? Nowhere but to such a “still, small voice,” the most terrifying of all. (**Review by David Grundy**)

GINNUNGAGAP – CRASHED LIKE WRETCHED MOTH (EP)



Label: Conspiracy Records

Release Date: October 2006

Tracklist: Crashed like Wretched Moth

Personnel: Stephen O’ Malley: piano

Additional Information: Single-sided LP, available in a limited edition of 500 copies.

‘Ginnungagap’, on this outing, is Stephen O’ Malley solo (when previously used, on the Indian-flavoured album ‘Remeindre’, the alias referred to a drone super-group of sorts). Using overdubbed piano rather than guitar gives a different sound and a slightly different feel to his work with Sunn O)); though of course the music is similarly dark and low-toned, there’s greater textural variety. There are important structural differences, too, and perhaps I can best explain how these work by way of an analogy. Sunn’s music is pretty much a wall of sound, and ‘Moth’, while not nearly so loud or overpowering, does build something of an edifice itself, but it’s an edifice where you can picture the individual bricks being used to construct the wall. It evolves into its final shape, whereas Sunn begin with the shape fully formed, and the evolutions in their music occur on the level of slightly morphing the contours of said shape, while retaining its basic structure and character. I wouldn’t see it as necessary to expand this into an evaluation of the relative merits of O’Malley with Sunn or O’Malley on his own – he’s trying to do different things in the two contexts, but both are valid parts of his artistic conception.

Well, I say that, but one caveat I do have with regards to this release is just how seriously it seems to take itself. Let’s look up the word ‘Ginnungagap’: ah yes, “in Norse mythology, Ginnungagap (“seeming emptiness” or “gaping gap”) was a vast windy emptiness that existed before the ordering of the world.” That’s weighty stuff indeed (or ‘weightless stuff’, ha ha), and, probably, the music wants to aim for the same sort of atmosphere – but, for me, Sunn O)) are interesting because they simultaneously take themselves dead seriously and see the funny side of the situation (their performances may be ‘rituals’, but they also involve consuming a bottle of wine each on-stage, and thus getting (presumably) quite sloshed – and drunkenness doesn’t carry with it quite the same mystique as blowing your mind on LSD). Hell, I don’t mean to suggest that no one should take music seriously – I just happen to rather like the almost comedic edge to some of Sunn’s work (an element of self-parody is always lurking when Julian Cope gets involved, as on ‘My Wall’ from ‘White 1’). Then again, I also like (or am at least impressed by) the tremolo hell of ‘It Took the Night to Believe’, or the sounds of Malefic groaning from inside his coffin. I guess you *can* have it both ways.

Anyway, enough about Sunn, and let’s take ‘Crashed Like Wretched Moth’ on its own terms. Sure, it may not challenge the man who seems its obvious inspiration – Charlemagne Palestine – in the hypnotic/disturbing stakes, but when heard in the right context and in the right mood, it can mess with the head in the same bizarre way – like being punched repeatedly over the head by a hand made solely out of water. And, if you get bored, you could always try to spot the fleeting jazz allusion at 16:13 (blink and you’ll miss it) – it’s probably completely coincidental, but I can’t help associating one of the upper-register phrases O’Malley plays with the opening phrase of Mingus’ ‘Sues Changes.’

Arguably more beautiful than the music itself is the sleeve-art by Seldon Hunt. (Incidentally, Hunt wrote the liner notes that accompanied the 2005 re-issue of Sunn O))’s ‘Grimm Robe Demos’ – well, not exactly traditional liner notes; let’s call them pagan meditations. During April 2006, he also held a week-long joint exhibition with O’ Malley at the Domino Festival in Brussels, for which ‘Crashed Like Wretched Moths’ served as the soundtrack). Hunt’s contribution to CLWM is a silver etching on the second side of the LP, and, perhaps more importantly, a couple of photos on the front and back covers. There’s some wonderfully rich colour and great depth to these images of a bushy expanse in front of a particularly glorious gold/ochre hinterland haze, and a woodland clearing touched by the faintest fringes of that haze. The first of these seems to hinge on the contrast between dark woods and bright sky (fading to white at the top, hinting at a mushroom-cloud and suggesting that things aren’t as serene as they seem), yet things aren’t that simple – the sunset seems to inhabit the bushes, to invade ground level even though the shot composition ostensibly suggests otherwise. It’s not just that the sky reflects in the pools of water seen in the foreground, but something more mysterious. I can’t put my finger on any specific tweaks that Hunt has given the image: I think, more than anything, it’s the combination of the two photos that gives them their strange power.

One might draw a parallel to the way that O’ Malley builds up layers in the music, obscuring the original piano motif until eventually it is so absorbed into the overall texture that it seems not be there at all – though its presence still inhabits the music in much the same ways as the sunset inhabits the bushes and woods in Hunt’s images, as a constant quasi-drone. Of course,

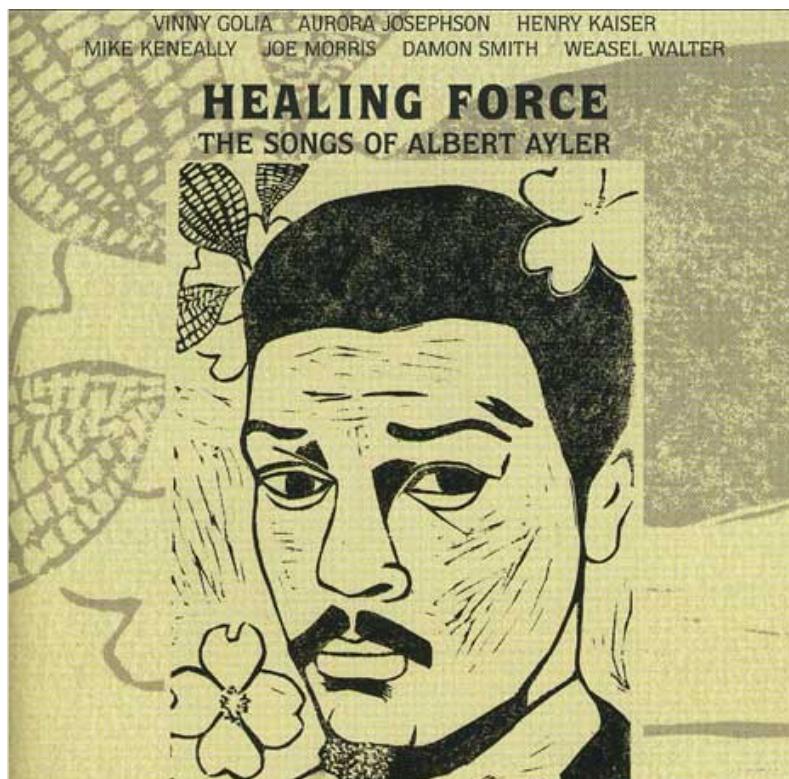
being more cynical, one might say that this record was more about the product than the music itself – the vinyl LP as aesthetic object, beautifully packaged and making a virtue of its incompleteness (could the single-sided pressing be an attempt to latch onto the mystique surrounding Ayler's 'Bells'?). It's a strategy notably employed by the Brothers Opalio, of 'My Cat Is An Alien' – though some of the musical quality in their many releases is arguably very variable (I still feel a little queasy recalling the awful Thurston Moore piano piece, 'American Coffin,' on one of the volumes in their series 'From the Earth to the Spheres'), Roberto Opalio's artwork at least makes sure that the albums will look nice on your shelves (maybe you could frame them and put them up on your wall).

In itself, I quite like that fusion of visual art and music – and, of course, it's one that's always been there, in jazz and other genres (not that O' Malley is anywhere near jazz, or wants to be, 'Sue's Changes' allusion or no) – think Blue Note Records, ESP, CTI, or !Impulse!. This sort of 'lovingly-assembled' package obviously foregrounds the amount of thought that's gone into it a lot more than the lo-fi/lo-budget ethos of something like Tiger Asylum records, some of whose releases are reviewed in both this and the previous issue of 'eartrip' – but it's arguable that equal care has been taken in both cases, as to what sort of feeling the listener has about the release, even before they've actually listened to it. For me, that goes beyond just marketing and into craftsmanship; why shouldn't musicians care about that side of things?

O' Malley (or the people at Conspiracy Records) haven't just thought about the design aspect, though; one feels that the distribution is limited not so much because of the difficulties of making the album (though pressing those single-sided white wax LPs and printing the artwork/etchings must be a pain in the ass/labour of love (whichever way you want to look at it!)) – but to give the album an added mystique. O'Malley, after all, is something of a superstar in the admittedly very 'underground' world of drone music (probably because of the metal connection). So is the whole 'limited edition' aspect just a way to get more people to buy the album by paradoxically *limiting* the audience? Maybe it is, though I give O' Malley enough credit artistically for that not to matter. 'Crashed Like Wretched Moth' remains an interesting, if not essential item in his discography.

(Review by David Grundy)

**GOLIA/ JOSEPHSON/ KAISER/ KENEALLY/ MORRIS / SMITH/ WALTER –
HEALING FORCE: THE SONGS OF ALBERT AYLER**



Label: Cuneiform

Release Date: 2007

Track listing: New New Grass / Message From Albert; Music is the Healing Force of the Universe; Japan/Universal Indians; A Man is Like a Tree; Oh! Love of Life; Thank God for Women; Heart Love; New Generation; New Ghosts / New Message.

Personnel: Vinny Golia: reeds; Aurora Josephson: voice; Henry Kaiser: guitar; Mike Keneally: piano, guitar, voice; Joe Morris: guitar, bass; Damon Smith: bass; Weasel Walter: drums.

We might note that the record is titled ‘the *songs* of Albert Ayler’. (Although, truth be told, ‘Japan’ is by Pharoah Sanders, a short track which appears on ‘Tauhid’. Its simple and gentle melody sits well alongside some of the other tracks though, and, for my money, it goes more interesting places than Sanders’ version, which was content simply to let the melody play out as an interlude between the ‘meatier’, longer tracks on the album.) So, as I said – songs. There is an accent on melody, and that was the problem people always had with Ayler’s late work – yes, there had always been melody, catchy melody, repetitive melody, but the form didn’t feel as constrained as when he fitted his burning flights into strange vocals, backing choruses, backbeats, 60s hippie/religious lyrics. What this release does so successfully is to merge the two Aylers – the late-period songster with the one struggling to get out in tracks like ‘Masonic Inborn’ (a rambling, overdubbed bag-pipe duet).

But it is reconciled within the form. It helps that years have passed, perhaps, and avant-garde and popular musics have, in some spheres, moved closer together, as well as drifting ever further apart in others in terms of sales, audiences, reception. The two best-known players on this record provide good examples of this: Weasel Walter has worked with no-wave and free-jazz musicians alike, and Henry Kaiser too has moved from playing with Derek Bailey to tackling the legacy of Miles Davis’ 70s work (itself a fusion of elements of rock with more ‘out’ forms of jazz) in the Yo Miles! project, also released on cuneiform. The two spheres can thus move side by side without seeming forced together, in order to create something which feels a lot more like a natural whole than Ayler’s experiments.

Apart from one misplaced Kaiser solo on ‘Music is the Healing Force’, the album stays on the side of good taste, its very sincere treatment of Ayler’s religious protestations fitting into the unlikely filtering of the radical hopes of the 60s through the petulance and aggression of the 80s and 90s – thus ‘New Generation’ seems equal parts punk, no-wave and hippie (in attitude, anyway). The musicians know when to take things straight – a lot of these are cracking tunes, after all, let’s not forget, whatever you think of Maria’s lyrics – but the tone is generally more experimental than on the originals, so that the dissonant delivery of ‘Oh Love Of Life’ surpasses even the oddness of Ayler’s own original vocal.

Singer Aurora Josephson avoids such lapses in judgement as the ‘naïve’ vocals of Mary Maria on ‘Island Harvest’ and goes for straight sincerity – with the ability to keep up with the other musician’s improvisational flights once things get heated. Listen to her control on the final song, testifying about the holy ghost: one phrase repeats itself utterly. Also worth a mention is Vinny Golia on a variety of reeds (including, somewhat surprisingly, flute (on ‘Heart Love’), as well as New-Orleans tinged clarinet). The collective chanting which occasionally surfaces mostly avoids 60s hippiedom – it’s almost thuggish on ‘New Grass’, giving it a frightening force which contrasts with the child-like flute/sung melody. And, even though the ensemble chanting of Ayler’s own words as the opening track does have a rather sickly sentimental guitar backing and might best be skipped on a second playback, as an opening statement it does at least go to show that this group of musicians is willing to take Ayler seriously, as he deserves.

(Review by David Grundy)

MATTHEW HERBERT BIG BAND – THERE'S ME AND THERE'S YOU

the

MATTHEW HERBERT BIG BAND

Date: September 5th 2008 Petition No.: 0001

Petition to: _____

We, the undersigned, believe that music can still be a political force of note and not just the soundtrack to over-consumption

N ^o	SIGNATURE	PRINTED NAME	RESIDENCE	OCCUPATION
01	Matthew Herbert	MATTHEW HERBERT	KENT	MUSICIAN
02	Phil Parnell	PHIL PARNELL	ATHBOEANE	MD
03	Russell Swift	RUSSELL SWIFT	TODDINGTON	Fixer
04	Toby Donnelly	TOBY DONNELLY	LONDON	ACCIDENTAL VICE PRESIDENT
05	Ben Castle	BEN CASTLE	HAZLEMERE	SAXOPHONIST
06	Bob Mackay	BOB MACKAY	KINGSTON - UPON - THAMES	BASS SAX/BASS CLARINET
07	Chris Cole	CHRIS COLE	UPPER DEAN	TROMBONIST
08	Howard McGill	HOWARD MCGILL	BRIXTON	SAX
09	Dave Okumu	DAVE OKUMU	LONDON TOWN	GUITARIST
10	Eska Mtungwazi	ESKA MTUNGWAZI	NUNHEAD, LONDON	VOCALIST
11	Espen Laub	ESPEN LAUB	AARHUS DENMARK	DRUMS
12	Martin Williams	MARTIN WILLIAMS	LOCAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB, LONDON SW1	TENOR SAXOPHONE
13	Adam Linsley	ADAM LINSLEY	BRIGG, NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE	TRUMPETER
14	H.D. McGill	H.D. MCGILL	FALMOUTH GREEN, LONDON	SAX PLAYER
15	Torben Bjoernskov	TORBEN BJOERNSKOV	SLENDERBORG, DENMARK	BASS
16	Andrew Cook	ANDREW COOK	NOTTINGHAM	TRUMPETER
17	Southern State	SOUTHERN STATE	OTWATRA	MUSIC AGENT
18	Justin James	JUSTIN JAMES	WHITSBOROUGH	BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Label: !K7

Release Date: October 2008

Tracklist: The Story, Pontificate, Waiting, The Yesness, Battery, Regina, The Rich Man's Prayer, Breathe, Knowing, Nonsound, One Life, Just Swing

Personnel: Eska Mtungwazi: vocals; Peter Furness: clarinet (tracks 6, 7 & 9); Andy Findon: flute (tracks 6, 7 & 9); Adam Linsley, Andrew Cook, Graham Russell, Stuart Brooks: trumpets; Ashley Horton, Gordon Campbell, John Higginbotham: trombones; Chris Coles: trombone (track 2); Ben Castle, Bob Mackay, Dave O'Higgins, Howard McGill: saxophones; Martin Williams: saxophone (track 2); Rebecca Gibson: saxophone (track 10); Matthew Herbert: keyboards, piano, arrangements; Phil Parnell: piano; Dave Okumu: guitar (track 1); Torben Bjoernskov: bass; Espen Laub: drums

As President-Elect Barack Obama is preparing to take office on Tuesday, January 19th, one might choose to reflect on the Bush Administration's previous eight years of power. Yes, there have been countless blunders, large and small, as well as immeasurable damage done to not just American citizens, but to people all over the globe. However, amid this catastrophe, W. and his cohorts have managed to inspire a group of people who are driven by something other than bloodlust and greed: musicians. From Green Day to the Dixie Chicks, American musicians came out strong to oppose the President, but there didn't seem to be much foreign output on the subject. With *There's Me and There's You*, The Matthew Herbert Big Band takes the protest album to new heights in terms of symbolism, intelligence, and artistic execution.

The music itself is moving at times, but requires some research to alleviate the uncertainty associated with its frequently ambiguous lyrics. The album's liner notes and artist website (matthewherbertbigband.com) reveal the source of every sound used on each track. This information makes the music very interesting because it allows the listener to explore social commentaries, intended or contrived, embedded within the songs. For example, "Battery" features noises from one McDonald's Filet O'Fish, one snap of a soda can, and one plastic garden chair. Are these objects referring to increased laziness and the obesity epidemic? There are also

sounds from one airplane and a battery charger. How odd?! In an online interview Herbert says the song is based on information gathered by David Rose of The Observer newspaper about a detainee at Guantanamo Bay, Bisher al-Rawi, who was flown around the globe for possession of a battery charger, which they believed could be used to manufacture an I.E.D. After a closer listen, the pops of electric shock crackling behind a computerized voice chanting lyrics like "Blindfold goggles/In the harness/Shackled/Handcuffed" and "Tell me all the people/Tell me all of their names/The names of the people/All of the people that you've ever met/That you've never met/That you've wanted to meet" become mildly more decipherable and it's apparent that Herbert is recreating an interrogation. The song is certainly off-putting, but its intended message could easily go over the head of a casual listener who didn't have the time or patience to perform due diligence.

Symbolism is at the core of this album. The majority of sounds used have a far deeper meaning than what can be perceived aurally. "Waiting," for example, contains the noise of rattling matches recorded in the corridors below The House of Parliament, where each match represents 100,000 people dead in Iraq. "Nonsound" starts out as a beautifully peaceful tune with the Brass section playing over a somber piano and brushed drums. Eventually nonmusical sounds, something like an open-air market, are layered in. What follows is an outbreak of gunshots and shouting. According to matthewherbertbigband.com the sounds are of "Israeli I.D.F. soldiers shooting protestors (Palestinian and internationals) against the wall." It's eerie and extraordinarily sad to hear music accompany the loss of human life. An argument for indecency and disrespect could be made against this song, but this is a form of protest and I firmly believe the intent is to bring awareness to the dead and not to capitalize on this tragedy for dramatic effect.

"One Life," on the other hand, is fantastic on its own and the hidden meaning actually enhances repeated listenings. On the surface it's about living life for the moment. Eska Mtungwaz's voice is comforting, mature, and urgent, which gives seemingly elementary lyrics like "Simplicity gets harder when you're older" and "Grip the hands of someone you're in love with/There's your answer" a sage-like wisdom. Similarly, the funeral-ready piano playing and nearly triumphant trumpet create an unexpected emotional synergy that keeps the song from entering the realm of 1980's cheese-anthems like Van Halen's "Right Now." Keeping time is a rapid-fire drum machine that seems to simulate life's quick passing by cranking out 32nd and possibly 64th notes (if I could count that fast I'd be sure). In reality each beat represents 100 people killed in Iraq from the start of the war in 2003 to October 2006 and serves as the most sobering and most subtle form of protest on the album.

Being an artist is not easy. For one, it requires an immense amount of talent, which Herbert certainly has. It also requires the ability to use that talent to create a cohesive work that stimulates the minds of its observers, which *There's Me and There's You* accomplishes. But, I don't believe this work reaches its full potential. Music, as the sole medium, limits what an artist can convey, and this piece would benefit from visual accompaniment. It's like going to *2001: A Space Odyssey* with your eyes closed. When I hear this album I feel like I'm missing out on something grander. There is just too much symbolism in the items used to create this music that the listener can easily miss out on. However, this piece would make an excellent stage performance. Certain sounds, like the cutting up of 70 credit cards ("The Rich Man's Prayer") and 70 simultaneous text messages ("Knowing") could be recreated live and projection screens could be utilized to flash the slogan "We are empowered and inspired to make a world that is desired by the next generation and admired right now" used in "Pontificate." The piece could even be presented in the form of an actual protest considering the large number of people it took to record: 18 musicians, a choir of 27, and a 70 member "orchestra of noise."

This is not an easy album to listen to. It's confusing, vague, and dense. But art should not always be easy and should never be looked down upon for challenging those who witness it. The Matthew Herbert Big Band has created a commendable work of art. It is highly cerebral and requires a great amount of attention, research, and open-minded thought to fully grasp its intentions. Any artist with the ability to organize and execute such a well thought out and passionate work deserves to be heard and, at the very least, deserves our respect.

(Review by Aaron Hicks)

RICK JENSEN QUARTET – *THE MOSAICIST*



Label: Clinical Archives

Release Date: November 2008

Tracklist: The Mosaicist

Personnel: Rick Jensen: Tenor Sax/Alto Clarinet;
Phil Somervell: Piano; Colin Somervell: Bass;
Paul May: Drums/Percussion

Additional Information: Recorded live at The Vortex, London, UK by Helen Petts 15/6/08. Download release, available from <http://www.clinicalarchives.spyw.com>.

Recorded on one of John Russell's 'Mopomoso' nights at the Vortex Jazz Club, this performance is all about relentlessness. Even during the quieter, slower sections, one never feels much sense of rest or calm: the gorgeous series of piano chords in the final few minutes seem about to lead into a jazz ballad, but Paul May's twitching drums ensure something much spikier. The closing chord could just as well be about to lead onto a fresh set of improvisations as to create any sort of conclusion; in fact, it is this very uncertainty that makes it such a fine, none-too-obvious closing moment, poised as it is between cessation and continuation. As a jazz performance, it might come across as something of a damp squib – 'you're going to let the music fizzle out like *that*?' – but, in this instance, it feels more appropriate than, say, the Brotzmann device of suddenly stopping while seemingly still in the middle of things, signalling the end of the piece by leaping four feet into the air. Of course, different groups and different players develop different strategies to cope with the problem of knowing when and how to stop, but these often remain unspoken, emerging from what might call a subconscious musical intelligence that has developed through successive performances. So you can never be quite sure what you're going to get – and that's why even the more hesitant examples, such as this one, are so valuable; they reveal just how far out on a limb these players go, every time they play. It's what I love about freely improvised music – sure, all sorts of structural problems can be raised, which may be very tricky to negotiate, but it is in that negotiation that the most interesting things tend to emerge.

New-Zealand born but London-based, Jensen has a very individual tone on tenor sax. Though the music's impact is totally different, perhaps David S. Ware is the closest equivalent I can think of. This is evident most readily in terms of tone – both Ware and Jensen have a particular propensity for low barks, rather than the 'screeching' altissimo passages that characterise a lot of free jazz – but it's also true of phrasing: there's a tendency to work round a figure, to repeat a phase with slightly altered phrasing or to play a succession of different phrases with the same rhythmic content. Sounds emerge in sharp bursts, twirling round in tight, compact jabs, while short pauses allow the assault to maintain a consistent momentum (breathing points, the slightest rest to develop new directions or ideas). And because there's a constant dialogue going on underneath as well, the music feels continuous – choppy piano chords or linear patterns add a rhythmic emphasis sometimes also taken up by bass and drums, sometimes abandoned for scraps and blurs of sound more in the vein of 'English improv'. In this way the group avoid the problems which might arise from the sax + rhythm section line-up – namely, a lack of textural variety.

And it's not all hard-edged free jazz either (though things tend to remain on the bleak and aggressive side): about twenty-three minutes in, Jensen breaks out his alto clarinet over the piano's ominous low tread, unobtrusively underlined by arco bass and sympathetically groaning percussive scrapes and screeches. A subsequent return to tenor leads, perhaps inevitably, to eventual echoes of the opening mood (this time with some fine high saxophone whoops) – and then to that fascinating conclusion, as just piano and drums find their way to silence, like someone squeezing through a narrow gap, slinking off down a narrow alley into the darkness.

(Review by David Grundy)

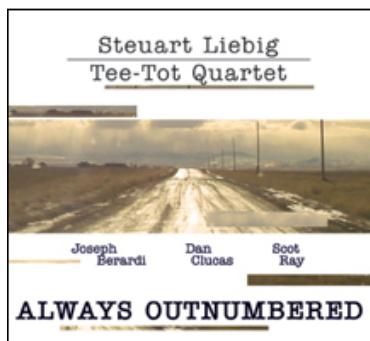
MIKE KHOURY/ WILL SODERBERG – *VOLUMEN DREI*

Label: Tiger Asylum **Release Date:** 2008 **Tracklist:** Untitled tracks **Personnel:** Mike Khoury: violin; Will Soderberg: electronics **Additional Information:** Recordings from mid-2007. CD-R release available from <http://www.tigerasylum.com>.

Shoots the demented pinball set up full of holes in future deserted arcade. Glass broken underfoot crunches calamitous triggering kaleidoscope flurries, in the corner of your eye. Violin's low lonely howl seems human in the now slow-whirr of electronic cold chamber; but the violence of stretched animal gut over shaped wood is an acknowledged paradox as string scrape's delay-pedal near drowns in feedback fuzz. Noise could not be white here, the blinding happened before in this post-holocaust world where sound equals noise equals sight, or its lack: sounds there to guide conjure the mind-picture of echo factory, empty while violinman squats in corner, sometimes stands scarecrow-dark, the Paganini devil whose energy is all spent. Did he find this battered instrument by chance, or is it that he has been wandering the rounds, prophet of reverberation triggers deep bell, echo distorts and bounces in endless circles round the four wall prison which won't keep out the demons. Merges to howl, emerges to be lost forever; human voices would be hauntings here.

(‘Review’ by David Grundy)

STEUART LEIBIG/ TEE-TOT QUARTET – *ALWAYS OUTNUMBERED*



Label: pfMENTUM

Release Date:

Tracklist: 07-04-00; serenade; wrong how long; stutterstep; fearless; clean, shaved and sober; bobtail; cooked and chopped; chucktown; mercy kitchen; sunshine candy; barrelfoot grind; lonewoolf

Personnel: Dan Clucas: cornet; Scot Ray: dobro; Steuart Leibig: contrabassguitar; Joseph Berardi: drums, percussion

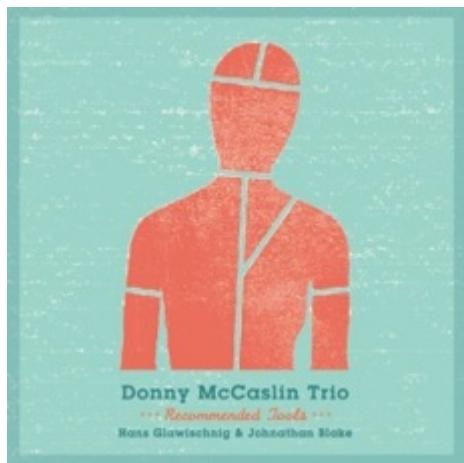
I guess whether you will enjoy the album or not depends very much on what you think of leader Steuart Leibig's compositions. For me, and this will seem strange, they are just a little too polished – and I know that the music's charm comes partly from the less-than-polished sounds of twanging electric dobro and growling cornet. But the tunes themselves feel just a little too expert in their careful balance of consonance and dissonance (or ‘consonant dissonance’, which is maybe a term closer to the sort of thing that's happening here); every piece is constructed in virtually the same manner (‘mercy kitchen’ being something of an exception), with a unison statement of the theme from trumpet and dobro, drums usually playing a fairly steady beat and bass either accentuating this with an insistently repeated riff (on the more rockish pieces, such as the opening track), or playing counter-lines, often somewhat stop-start in nature. The melodies reappear in between solos as well as in opening and closing statements, and the solos thus feel rather crammed in between the melodic expository stuff.

Interesting things are happening in these solos, however: Clucas in particular has an attractive voice on cornet, full of the sort of smears and growls that one might associate with Taylor Ho Bynum, on the same instrument, and which indicate a growing interest in ‘vintage’ players such as Buber Miley (although arguably this was an important lineage with the free jazz players of the 60s also). The electrified dobro's sound gives a nicely unusual texture, somewhat appropriate to the cover photograph of a wide, ochre-lit stretching road: and Ray's solos can be quite exciting, in a way that almost comes to resemble the finger-flying excitement of superior jazz fusion, and at other times is nearer a distorted version of twangy, slide-guitar bluegrass. But he does tend to rely on the same tricks in several solos – for instance, sliding up and down a string for a see-saw effect which feels more like an ‘interesting’ flourish than something which really contributes to the emotional/logical development of the piece, or the solo.

There are basically two species of tune on display here: the crisp, fast, ‘cool’ edginess of the faster numbers (which take up much of the album), and tracks like ‘serenade’, which are slower, more ‘open’ and melancholy-sounding (though there’s always a sense of hidden menace). In the end, thirteen pieces comes to seem like overkill, particularly given the similarities in construction and execution which I’ve outlined: one can’t help wishing that more space could have been given to showcasing these players’ soloistic voices, or to the group interplay (double soloing by trumpet and guitar on ‘cooked and chopped’), rather than reverting so schematically to the predictable tread of similar compositions. In this case, longer tunes would undoubtedly have meant more, not less variety.

But I always feel churlish giving negative reviews: for a more positive (and perhaps, more perceptive) analysis of the music, Bill Barrett’s liner note is exemplary, pointing out the Quartet’s transfiguration of ‘roots music’ (a result of instrumentation as much of anything, I’d suggest). Whether you agree or not, it’s an interesting angle. For my money, a more interesting example of this sort of ‘left-field Americana’ would be Erik Friedlander’s recent solo cello disc, ‘Block Ice and Propane.’ (Review by David Grundy)

DONNY McCASLIN – *RECOMMENDED TOOLS*



Label: Greenleaf Music

Release Date: August 2008

Tracklist: Recommended Tools; Eventual; Late Night Gospel; Excursion; Isfahan; The Champion; Margins of Solitude; 3 Signs; 2nd Hour Revisited; Fast Brazil.

Personnel: Donny McCaslin: tenor sax; Hans Glawischnig: bass; Jonathan Blake: drums

Such is the history of tenor plus bass and drum trios that any saxophonist willing to work in this format is, however unwittingly, making a statement about his ability as an improviser. Any results will, by necessity, be compared with the sterling work of such past masters as John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and Joe Henderson. As a consequence, many musicians have left the tenor trio well alone at least until they have reached what they hold to be the requisite level of maturity.

Having just turned forty, Donny McCaslin has released this disc with companions Hans Glawischnig on bass and Jonathan Blake of drums stating in interviews that he now feels totally prepared to meet this challenge. The year 2008 saw a lot of critical praise being heaped on McCaslin - no doubt due to some impressive performances in bands as diverse as “Steps Ahead”, Dave Douglas’ quintet and Maria Schneider’s big band. Is “Recommended Tools” therefore, evidence then that McCaslin has now evolved into the fully mature jazz soloist? I would suggest that the answer must be an unreserved “yes” and demonstrative that, since the untimely passing of the great Mike Brecker, he is clearly his heir apparent.

Caught somewhere between Brecker’s convoluted and sophisticated approach to improvisation and the more wayward style of Joe Lovano, this is an impressive performance by anyone’s standards. However, the album is largely made up of originals that do not quite match the quality of his writing on the previous latin-inspired record “In pursuit” and the one non-original, a version of Billy Strayhorn’s “Isfahan” is unlikely to replace Johnny Hodges’ lyrical approach in fan’s affections. The imbalance of truly memorable themes is, perhaps, the one weakness in this disc but this is countered by some wonderful flights of improvisation. Certainly, his writing on “In pursuit” seemed to hit pay dirt with every track seemingly a great tune whereas the first half of this latter record is not quite of the same calibre. Throughout the CD,

McCaslin is clearly the star of the performance as the bassist and drummer seem to lack the personality to match the leader although they provide more than adequate support and some sympathetic accompaniment too on the more introspective compositions such as "Margins of solitude." The better material occurs in the second half of the record with the track "The Champion" the clear pick of the bunch. At one stage, he performs entirely solo and yet the sheer swing with which he launches in make the absence of the bass and drums barely noticeable. On "3 signs", there is a degree of rhythmic interplay where the trio really starts to open up and close attention to McCaslin's improvised lines reveals just how inventive he is with his use of time. If anything, these ideas are taken even further on the following "2nd hour revisited" with Blake being allowed to stretch out even more behind his kit and the tenor saxophonist almost seeming to evoke Sonny Rollins in his approach with motifs continually chewed over and reinvented. Like the elder musician, McCaslin can make the potential for these permutations seem endless. The disc concludes with a romp through "Fast Brazil", a number that has also appeared on his previous release. On this version, the gloves have come off and the trio abandons itself to some of the most uninhibited and knotty playing on the whole session.

Possessing a readily recognisable tone and an intelligent approach to the improvised line, this is a hugely impressive record. However, had the whole record been quite as good as the exuberant closing three tracks or "The Champion", we would have been talking about an exceptional tenor trio - a potential classic. As it stands, it is sufficient to say from the evidence of "Recommended Tools" that Donny McCaslin has now arrived as one of the most significant tenor saxophonists of our generation and produced a very worthy addition to the canon of the tenor trio. **(Review by Ian Thumwood)**

STEPHEN O' MALLEY/ ATTILA CSIHAR – 6°Fskyquake



Label: Editions Mego

Release Date: January 2008

Tracklist: 6°Fskyquake

Personnel: Stephen O'Malley: HP 200CD & Travis Bean / Fender Twin Reverb; Attila Csihar: Vocals

Additional Information: Room recording at TEAM Gallery, NYC 10th, 11th & 12th June 2007. Vocals recorded at Château Csihar, Budapest June 2007

Like the other Stephen O' Malley release reviewed in this issue ('Crashed Like Wretched Moth', released under the Ginnungagap moniker), '6°Fskyquake' was originally designed to accompany an art gallery exhibition – in this case, two simultaneous solo shows by sculptor Banks Violette, during summer 2007.

One senses that some of the work's original impact may have been lost – not just because it is no longer *in situ*, alongside Violette's sculptures (the only residue of these being the cover art photo), but because the original 8 and a half hour duration of the piece has been reduced to a mere 33 minutes. This recording then, is only a fragment, an example, a sampling. One wonders why a longer portion could not have been released: given the capacities of even a single CD, which will hold 80 minutes of music, just over half an hour seems like a very small slice of the pudding.

However, upon listening, one realises that this is probably as adequate a representation as any. The album release is inevitably going to be a different beast to the installation, and what might seem legitimised by its gallery context cannot be so excused during home listening. Presumably, no one stayed during the entire 8 hour plus show, and it is even less likely that anyone will sit in front of their stereo for over half a day (this is hardly 'stoner music').

As on Sunn O)))'s most recent release, the marvellous 'Domkirke', O'Malley is joined by Norwegian vocalist Attila Csihar, who, in probably his 'artiest' context yet, proves once again his skill as a singer of operatic power, with an ability for conjuring (often oppressive) atmospheres. On 'Domkirke', Csihar's delay-treated bass rumblings provided the perfect peg for

reviewers looking for a way into the latest drone odyssey: much could be made of the live concert recording's location in Bergen Cathedral, a reconciliation of sorts between Black Metal and the Church, in which the singing could be described as Gregorian, particularly when placed over the tectonic progress of Steve Moore's organ playing on the first track, 'Why Dost Thou Hide Thyself in the Clouds'. On 'Skyquake', singing his own texts based around "journeys inside imperial Tokyo," it seems that Csíhar was brought in to impose a more human element over O'Malley's unwavering electronic drones.

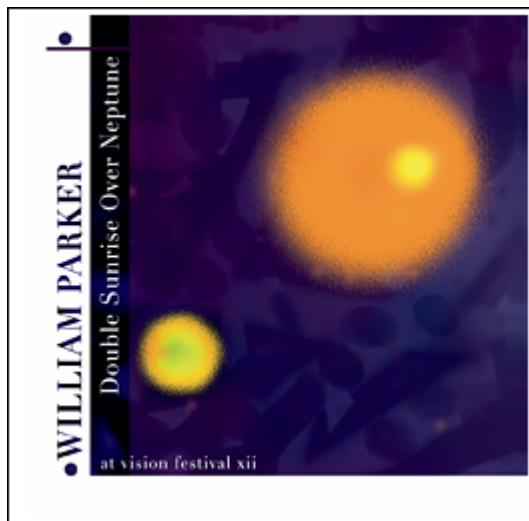
With Domkirke's handy historical peg removed, one is forced to concentrate on the voice itself, on its qualities as sound, rather than just skipping straight onto its qualities as signifier. Even if Csíhar is singing texts, you'll be hard pressed to make out words; it seems instead that one is presented with the *idea* of words, with the sound of word-like constructions being formed, constructions which nevertheless don't exist to 'mean' as much as to simply exist, inaccessible and abstract. This voice as sound opens up cavernous depths which forever conflict with the constant high sine pitches overhead; or rather, which enact not so much a conflict as a state of being. By this I mean that they are never going to come into resolution, a condition which has been accepted as the basis for their existence from the start – and perhaps it is the listener's realisation, and acceptance, of this fact, that is the true resolution. Resolution only comes once one stops looking for a resolution; conclusion when one realises that there is no conclusion (hence the sudden cut-off at the end of the CD).

O'Malley's drones are not continuous: instead, the work unfolds sectionally, often in fairly short bursts which last for maybe two minutes at a time. Nevertheless, the fact that there is little structural and sonic difference between these sections, and that they are so slow-moving, makes the work seem more continuous than it actually is. Csíhar's vocals stay in the same range, generally accompanied by O'Malley's drones, which are at either extremely high or extremely low pitches (and often both at once). In between the vocal/drone meat of the piece are sounds which can less easily be traced back to their sources, such as the flutterings at 19:20, which sound like a giant paper bag being continuously rustled, or the various whispers/breathing sounds which occasionally replace vocal rumbling. Even more occasionally, short, organ-like bursts occur, vaguely reminiscent of that opening track from 'Domkirke.'

The 'ritual' tag applies well here, ritual being sectional and repetitive in the manner that this music is sectional and repetitive. 'Skyquake', though this, lacks the essentially progressive nature of ritual, the sense of movement towards a goal. There is no equivalent to the mystical act at the heart of the ritual performance (the taking of Communion, let's say) – that act which ensures that there is always a *movement towards something*, however slow. What we have here, then, is the enactment of a ritual experience without the underlying purposefulness: ritual for its own sake which renders its usefulness and purpose as ritual questionable. In that sense it would not be stretching things too far to claim that, even if the piece itself is not religious, its concerns are religious ones, or ones connected with religion: how to deal with the religious impulse when one no longer believes.

The press release, when discussing the shared themes of O'Malley's sound installation and Banks Violette's sculptures, raises the idea of a "lost evocative experience." One might argue that this experience itself is evocative – but of something which one can't quite place, an evocation not of nothing, nor or something, but of a realm in-between. Csíhar's vocals may seem to explicitly reference Gregorian Chant, but are prevented from accomplishing the same function: placed in an art gallery, they are enclosed in a space similar to a Church in its sense of scale and reverence, but, all white light and bright lights, far removed from the Gothic darkness of Gregorianism. The only other specific references, or at least, associations (provided one cannot decipher Csíhar's texts) are to other electronic musics (drone, no-input) which are themselves challenging and disturbing because of their lack of overt referentiality. In that sense, there is a sharp contrast to the 60s work of La Monte Young or Terry Riley, with its very definite intention to evoke/create the conditions for another lifestyle, one associated with the drones of Indian music ('The Tambouras of Pandit Pran Nath') and in some sense with the countercultural movement (ancient traditions filtered through a very historically specific climate – that of 1960s America). O'Malley and Csíhar's drone-world is far more disturbing, and, arguably, far more engaged with the problems of existence in the modern world. (Review by David Grundy)

WILLIAM PARKER – *DOUBLE SUNRISE OVER NEPTUNE*



Label: AUM Fidelity

Release Date: August 2008

Tracklist: Morning Mantra; Lights of Lake George; O'Neal's Bridge; Neptune's Mirror

Personnel: William Parker: double reeds, doson'ngoni, conductor; Lewis Barnes: trumpet; Rob Brown: alto sax; Bill Cole: double reeds; Sabir Mateen: tenor sax, clarinet; Dave Sewelson: baritone sax; Jason Kao Hwang: violin; Mazz Swift: violin; Jessica Pavone: viola; Shiao-Shu Yu: cello; Joe Morris: guitar, banjo; Brahim Frigbane: oud; Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay: voice; Shayna Dulberger: bass; Gerald Cleaver: drums; Hamid Drake: drums.

Additional Information: Recorded live June 19 & 20, 2007 at Vision Festival XII by Stefan Heger

I'll let William Parker introduce the concepts behind this record in his own words. In his liner notes, he writes: *Double Sunrise* was born of a concept I call universal tonality, which is based off of the idea that all sounds like human beings come from the same place. All sound has a heartbeat and breathes the same as each human being. Some sounds are born in Africa; others are born in Asia, Europe, Australia or America. These sounds pass through certain human beings. We don't invent sounds, we are allowed to encounter them; we don't own them, they existed before we were born and will be here after we are gone."

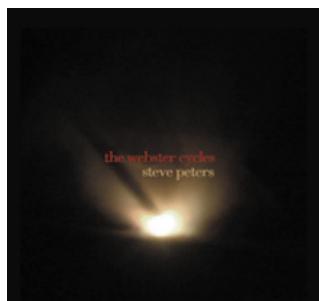
For me, Parker's faith in music, that of a true, devout believer, ultimately remains too simplistic to fulfill its own promises. That's not to say that I don't believe music has a power, but I'm not sure the project lives up to the immense claims made for it. Parker's notion is of a genuine 'world music' (more than that, a 'universe music'): a force that unifies all human beings, no matter what social/racial/political barriers seem to make them unalterably divided. Trouble is, no music could really live up to that description – like it or not, the sounds we here and the context we here them in are invariably socially, culturally and politically defined. Most of the theories around free jazz and improvisation rest ultimately on their status as *oppositional* musics (Derek Bailey's opposition to composition and the European classical system, the New Thing artists' opposition to racism and American foreign policies, etc). Parker's goal, though it is in opposition (to war, killing, racism, and other ills – all things that would presumably also be opposed by the artists just mentioned), ultimately seeks a state of utter transcendence, where there is no need for opposition – a utopia realized, (though exactly how is never very well defined), through music.

Conceptually, then, I'm not really convinced by Parker's argument. Will the sonic material win me over any more? Discarding for a moment the claims Parker makes for it, and taking it simply as sound on its own terms, it's a pleasant listen, though too often it fails to reach the heights of which he is capable. Structurally, the approach is a little unvaried: a bass-line will be repeated over and over again, providing an easy groove for various long, rhapsodic solos to unfold over. (These bass-lines are played by Shayna Dulberger rather than Parker, who sticks to dousson'gossi and double-reeds). At its best this repetitive riff effect can be hypnotic, if laidback (none of the rhythmical pounding of Miles Davis' 70s ensembles here), but fairly soon the music has fallen into the Pharoah Sanders 'Karma' syndrome: an attractive bass figure, repeated over and over, which tend to encourage noodling more than focussed improvisation.

Nonetheless, Parker's ensemble sounds more 'authentically' non-western than Sanders, even if the rhetoric surrounding it breathes that same rather naïve air of 60s idealism. Some of the most compelling moments on the album result from the unusual timbres of Parker and Bill Cole's double-reeds, duetting in swirling ecstasies of note-cycles. Indian singer Sangeeta Bandyopadhyay also entrances with her melismatic, wordless improvisations, though the sections where she sings Parker's lyrics have less force. Here, there is a similar problem to 2007's 'Cornmeal Dance': the lyrics are very worthy in intent, but feel too vague, too New-

Agey, to construct any real opposition or alternative to the current modes of life and living which they try to stand against. **(Review by David Grundy)**

STEVE PETERS – *THE WEBSTER CYCLES*



Label: Cold Blue Music

Release Date: 2008

Tracklist: The Webster Cycles

Personnel: J.A. Deane: trombones

Additional Information: Recorded in 1997

The CD itself comes with minimal packaging: no explanatory booklet (recording details are printed in small gold type on the inside cover), leaving the album art to do the job of somehow representing the music, or capturing some of its particular flavour. Thus we have a dark, sombre cover with a faint yellowing glow light round about the middle of the image, and a swirling smoke haze, just caught by light, on the back. And that's perhaps the treatment this music requires.

However, though there is no liner note to speak of, Cold Blue Music have released further information on their website, as has Peters on his own blog, and it might be worthwhile to consider what the knowledge of the mode of composition could add to the listening experience. “A single 30-minute piece that straddles the fence of structure and improvisation: all of the words in the dictionary that use only the letters A-G, arranged in alphabetical order. Each word is played for the length of one long breath, and within that the letters/notes are played spontaneously, as are dynamics, timbre, etc.”

In some way this seems to relate to what, for me, is the particular sadness of this work. Not in that it's reflected programmatically, but more as a meditation on the fundamental abstraction of music, and perhaps of words, in a certain climate. The Webster Cycles, as if revolving round and round, but without the resolution. The schematics of letters tied to notes adding to this cycling, as notes re-cycle (but without the growth that implies). The six overdubbed layers more often than not separated, the extremely heavy reverb itself another layer underlying it all like insistent massive fridgemum. At some points all six rise to mournful utterance, high and low. And there are occasionally other sounds, a breath warp or unidentified electronic ticking, but mostly it is the 'pureness' of it that dominates.

Partly, I suspect, this music's virtue will be its openness, and you have to be in the right frame of mind – somewhere where total concentration merges with that ‘ambient music’ state whereby one's consciousness is dimly aware of the music as presence, rather than registering its details.

On his blog, Peters describes this particular version as ‘lush’: for me, it has far more of a ‘chill’ to it than that description would allow. But, on second thoughts, I can see what he means: some quality to Deane's tone, his swelling slurs, the rounded fatness of his desolation. Indeed it would be perfectly possible to listen to this as ambient music, taken in the sense which Eno defined for it in his ‘Music for Airports’ liner notes, but I'd argue that it's full impact only occurs with this other type of listening I've just defined – perhaps one could call it liminal.

In any case, the multi-tracked layerings create effects of distance, giving the music a real spatial dimension, something explored very much in Webster's more recent works (such as a ‘Chamber Music’ series, based on field recordings of the frequencies in empty rooms). This was clearly something that preoccupied him as far back as 1980: Deane's trombone begins close-up a far-off calling horn, between a distance and unreachable call to a mournfulness more close-up, breaking down the boundaries between the distant and the intimate, as the occasional bite sends ripples through the endless (be)calm(edness) of the sonic ocean.

(Review by David Grundy)

SONIC YOUTH/ MATS GUSTAFFSON/ MERZBOW –

ANDRE SIDER AF SONIC YOUTH



Label: SYR (Sonic Youth Records)

Release Date: July 2008

Tracklist: Andre Sider af Sonic Youth

Personnel: Mats Gustafsson: saxophone; Merzbow: electronics; Thurston Moore: guitar; Lee Ranaldo: guitar, kraaklebox, bells; Kim Gordon: guitar, trumpet, voice; Jim O'Rourke: guitar, keyboard, measuring tape, mixing; Steve Shelley: drums, percussion

Additional Information: Recorded live at the Roskilde Festival, 1/7/2005 by Barok Films.

Here's the blurb: "This installment of Sonic Youth's series of experimental and mostly instrumental releases is available in a CD-only edition on the band's own SYR label. Andre Sider af Sonic Youth presents the complete "Other Sides of Sonic Youth" improvised live performance from the 2005 Roskilde Festival in Denmark, featuring Sonic Youth (with Jim O'Rourke) and guests Swedish saxophonist Mats Gustafsson and Japanese sound artist Masami Akita (a.k.a. Merzbow). The single piece performed was a structured [???] improvisation which for 60 minutes added and subtracted musicians one by one until only Akita was left onstage. Black Sabbath followed." [Did they seem tame after the last feedback wail and electronic grinding had died into tinnitus?]

Sonic Youth's own ramblings, which cover the first 15 minutes or so, are made to seem tame when, first Merzbow, then Mats Gustafsson enter. Immediately, things come into purpose, have a point to them, as Gustafsson's wails – no other adjective I can think to put to it that is more appropriate than soulfully – over Merzbow's machine-thrash and interlocks shreds of guitar feedback and hum-strum.

Wailing trumpet and electronic moans join with Kim Gordon's flatly desperate voice as the unleashed machine chaos meshes with a very human desperation – the two can't be separated. Everything blends into one amorphous sound mass, electronic malfunctioning siren piss-cry and derange-tuned guitars. We might compare another collaboration between Merzbow and an experimental rock group – Japanese doomers Boris – for the effect that he has, thrusting them out of conventionality into new realism, while at the same time their presence give some more easily identifiable 'direction' to his pure thickets of noise.

But how subversive really is 'noise music'? How much is it a cathartic experience in the sense that it expresses a sense of disillusionment with the world, of pain and all its negative emotions, and then allows you back to yr existence having wallowed in the misery artistically? How far does it rely on the misery of that existence to exist itself? What alternative does it posit? Is it nihilistic? What the hell is Jim O' Rourke doing thrashing around with measuring tape on his guitar (see the video on the Sonic Youth website)? Why does Merzbow always look so calm? How do you talk about such completely 'music-less' music, its lack of referentiality, without falling into the trap of metaphorical description, of trying to give it a referentiality it doesn't have? Does it bludgeon words to death? Does it even bludgeon music to death? Does this remind you of anything?

kill yr. idols
sonic death
it's the end of the world
and confusion is sex

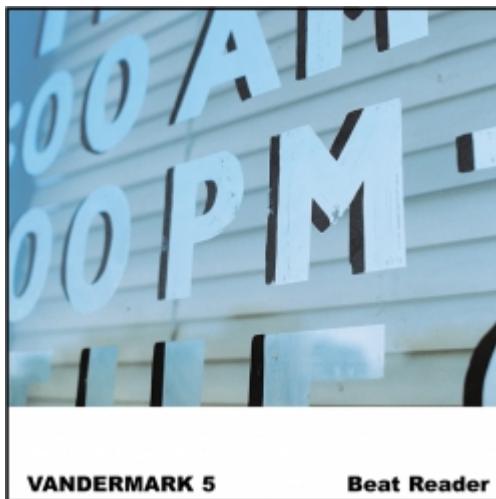
In this sexualised space of noise, a death-orgasm howl, a 'death rattle' without Leone's stateliness, a howl. Dissolved. You don't just kill yr idols, you destroy all idols, all ideals, all

ideology, in feedback howl. Nothing feed backs, positive feedback, negative, it's just there. Just fucking there.

Gustafson is barking against terror. As he is lung-blowing-blast at top-voice Merzbow quite casually just flicks his wrist and taps home his mouse and elephant-roar just kills it, just shreds everything into that one drunk scream. It's tempting to see it as some sort of ritual sacrifice, free jazz at the altar of noise music, noise music killing free jazz, with all that movement's spiritual hope implications, for just sheer utter nihilism and wail. Wail. Wail. Wail. Gustafson's last sounds are the dying bleats of the sacrifice, as he leaves Merzbow alone.

(Review by David Grundy)

VANDERMARK FIVE – *BEAT READER*



Label: Atavistic

Release Date: January 2008

Tracklist: Friction (for Gyorgy Ligeti); New Acrylic (for Andreas Gursky); Any Given Number (for Bernd and Hilla Becher); Signposts (for Lee Friedlander); Speedplay (for Max Roach); Compass Shatters Magnet (for Paul Rutherford); Further From The Truth (for Walker Evans); Desireless (for Daido Moriyama).

Personnel: Ken Vandermark: baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, clarinet; Dave Rempis, alto and tenor saxophone; Fred Lonberg-Holm: cello and electronics; Kent Kessler: bass; Tim Daisy: drums.

Ken Vandermark's mugshot ought to accompany the definition of "restless" in your Colliers or your OED. In jazz terms, he's as promiscuous as they come, leaping from project to project, starting new bands, resurrecting old ones. – one-offs, touring ensembles, tributes, film music, intriguing collaborations... If it's adventurous, he's game. Once the tally is complete, I expect he'll have released hundreds of recordings. But for better than a decade, he's always returned to the Vandermark 5. That any working jazz unit has endured today's climate for eleven years is truly remarkable; that it has managed to hold Vandermark's interest is miraculous.

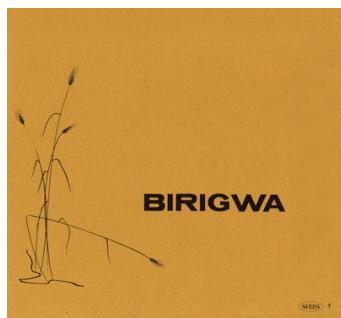
There have been lineup changes, of course, but the core dictum of pushing free music in all directions has remained undisturbed. The V5, as it currently stands, is the exciting Dave Rempis on alto and tenor saxophone, Fred Lonberg-Holm on cello and electronics, Kent Kessler on bass, Tim Daisy on drums, and Vandermark, who here sticks to the low end of the register, playing baritone sax and clarinet. It's a good choice, because he spends much of *Beat Reader*'s 69 minutes exploiting the guttural qualities of the baritone to an effect similar to his work on Bridge 61's (excellent) 2006 release *Journal*, which is to say that a lot of the time the thing flat-out rocks.

Vandermark's gift is his combinatory approach; simply, his palette is larger than most. Punk, rock and funk are as ripe for pillaging as are blues, jazz, classical, what have you. This inclusiveness is what has always marked the great Vandermark 5 releases (*Single Piece Flow*, *Target or Flag*, *A Discontinuous Line*), and here it means that the quintet veer from spastic energy to containment and austerity in the blink of an eye. They are simultaneously controlled and unhinged; propulsive and passive, as appropriate. Lonberg-Holm's cello is capable of centering the proceedings in a way that Jeb Bishop's guitar could not. Similarly, Rempis' tenor pushes things further into the funk realm. All in all, it is what we have come to expect from the V5: more of everything, the world in an hour. I wouldn't dare slight Ken Vandermark for his restlessness and his creative hyperactivity. It simply results in too much incredible music. But I do hope he always calls the Vandermark 5 home.

(Review by Andrew Forbes)

RE-ISSUES/HISTORICAL

BIRIGWA – *BIRIGWA*



Label: Porter Records

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Okusosola Mukuleke; Uganda; Kanemu-Kanabili; Lule Lule; Njabala; Obugumba; Yelewa

Personnel: Birigwa: voices and guitar; Stan Strickland: flute and tenor sax; Arthur Brooks: fleugelhorn; Mait Edey: piano and misc. percussion; Phil Morrison: bass; Yusef Crowder: shiko drum and misc. percussion; Vinnie Johnson: drums

Additional Information: Originally released in 1972 by Seeds.

Birigwa, a Ugandan vocalist who came to Boston in his early twenties to study at the New England Conservatory, doesn't seem to have recorded anything subsequent to this self-titled album, though his liner note promises that "soon more will be on the way!" Does that promise to make it one of those 'curiosities' that vinyl-hoarders and diggers so treasure? Maybe, but that it's something more than just nicely obscure is indicated by the care which Luke Mosling has lavished on the re-issue (something which could be said of all the releases on the increasingly burgeoning Porter Records): the carefully constructed foldout CD case manages to look neat but not buttoned-up, its ochre tones and minimal cover design giving the feeling of unwrapping a parcel, the interior contents not quite certain – though the attached sticker seems more keen to pin down some generic reference points: "Jaw-dropping Afro-Jazz with wild, soaring vocals and strong rhythms."

I'm not sure that description quite gives a fair impression of what you'll hear when you put this on: it strikes me as a lot more laid-back. Though the liner notes, by pianist Mait Edy, who ran the 'Seeds' label on which the album was first released, and who organised the session, tout this as a meeting between jazz and traditional African music, the gentle, folk-like sounds which one must assume to have been Birigwa's speciality are very much the focus here; only on 'Yelewa (Mosquito Song)', does the album really get anywhere near the Leon Thomas territory that is claimed for it, as Birigwa's clicks and shrill trills simulate insects and birds, in a more directly mimetic way than Thomas' ecstatic yodel. I'd say that the jazz players function strictly as a back-up band, perhaps to provide a little colouristic variety under the singing and guitar playing (and one might argue that they almost serve as a distraction, at times, from the solo material). Whatever the case, Birigwa's voice is very pleasant, in an unusually nasal way, and the aforementioned 'Yelewa' makes an appropriately rousing conclusion.

(Review by David Grundy)

PAUL BLEY QUINTET – *BARRAGE*



Label: ESP-Disk

Release Date: November 2008

Tracklist: Batterie; Ictus; And Now the Queen; Around Again; Walking Woman; Barrage

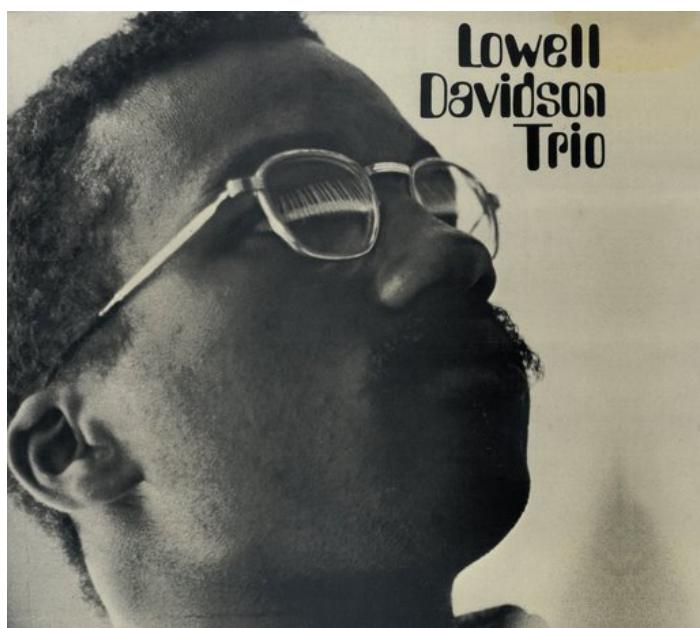
Personnel: Marshall Allen: alto sax; Dewey Johnson: trumpet; Paul Bley: piano; Eddie Gomez: bass; Milford Graves: drums.

Additional Information: Recorded on October 15th, 1964, NYC. All compositions (and 'tape assemblage' on 'Barrage') by Carla Bley.

When looking at the line-up – and, indeed, the album-title – for ‘Barrage’, which includes that old fire-breather Marshall Allen and trumpeter Dewey Johnson, of ‘Ascension’ fame, one might be forgiven for expecting something a little more obviously ‘out there’ than one ends up hearing. Perhaps the cover art provides a more suitable guide, with its multiply-duplicated use of the Michael Snow ‘Walking Woman’ motif (the silhouette of Carla Bley) appearing alongside photos of a sunglasses-clad Bley, who is demonstrating an almost Belmondo-esque mix of stand-offish but sensual cool, serious yet unpredictable – with an explosion into inverted colours in the centre hinting at the molten tensions which might sometimes boil up from beneath and within this veneer, lava-like. In any case, the ‘cool’ surfaces are almost always illusions: ‘Ictus’ opens and closes with a fairly frantic race through the melodic material, and, as the piano solo takes its turn in the roster, it’s particularly noticeable how Bley’s spindly lines are both undercut and reinforced by Eddie Gomez’ busily resonant bass. Indeed, the Puerto Rican Gomez’ playing on a number of ESP dates from this period is an important, if sometimes overlooked part of the their success – the ‘rhythm section’s’ fluidity and tense, crabwise-motions impart a real sense of urgency even to ballads as lovely as ‘And Now the Queen’ – a bit like those moments in conversation when someone leans forward to earnestly make their point, hands momentarily freezing in gestures of tensed emphasis.

That said (and the more I listen to the album the more I feel its internal dynamics really rippling through and catching hold in an almost muscular fashion), the trajectory of ‘Barrage’ as a whole may be somewhat different. It unfolds its tensions in contained units, in a series of what feel almost like miniatures, revolving around the beautifully poised elegance of Carla Bley’s compositions. Tracks tend to last for an average of five minutes, meaning that solos are kept brief: though of course the likes of Marshall Allen only need a few seconds to make an impact – his alto tone is somehow incredibly coarse, exhibiting a particularly kind of sound that only John Zorn really dares to match. I’m in two minds about this brevity: given the individual skills of the quintet members, I can’t help wishing that they’d recorded more than thirty-three minutes of music. On the other hand, perhaps that’s a contrast to the occasional flabbiness of the lengthy (never-ending?) ecstasy (flabbiness?) of the prototypical free jazz blow-out: here, instead, Bley’s Quintet provide us with bite-size chunks, not just in the sense that they are small and thus easily consumable, but that – inverting the phrase as the cover designers inverted their photos – they also have sharp teeth. **(Review by David Grundy)**

LOWELL DAVIDSON – *TRIO*



Label: ESP-Disk **Release Date:** September 2008 **Tracklist:** “L”, Stately 1; Dunce; Ad Hoc; Strong Tears

Personnel: Lowell Davidson: piano; Gary Peacock: bass; Milford Graves: drums

Additional Information: Recorded July 27th, 1965

From the beginning of 'Trio', it's clear that this is no fire-and-brimstone ESP date. I guess the nearest equivalent on the label would be Paul Bley, whose piano style, like Davidson's, could be construed as almost dry, in comparison to the manic energies of much free piano playing (or, what many people expect from free piano playing - in practice, the instrument, or its tradition, encourage something very different).

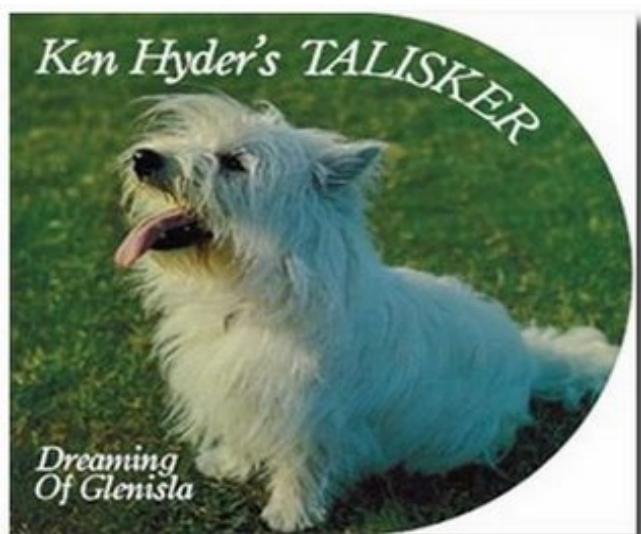
Davidson is clearly a consummate craftsman, with a very particular idea of where he wants the tune to go; this by no means precludes the spontaneity of improvisation, but there's always the feel of a delicately formal mind, rather than of someone over-egging the emotional pudding. There's clearly a lot of *thought* going on as the music moves in time (which presumably happened before the record date as well -of course, artists are thinking through their music when they're not playing, all the time, but this feels as if specifics and plans of campaign have been laid, though apparently it was an un-auditioned recording).

The melody of 'L' (standing for 'Lowell'?) has a strange and alluring charm to it; repetitive and with a certain feel of being locked into itself. Fragments recur throughout the piano solo, and, indeed the idea of the melody and its construction seem to influence the whole unfolding of the improvisation: individual phrases respond to each other in a continuous expounding of ideas, yet all seem to dance on and off the initial thematic material as well.

Davidson's touch is almost Ellingtonian on 'Stately 1', the rippling, slightly exotic piano over rumbling (as well as the slightly boxy sound) reminding me of the particular aesthetic of 'Money Jungle' (particularly 'Fleurette Africaine'). While Davidson sounds a more consciously 'avant-garde' than Ellington (there are far more sprinkles of notes quite far up the keyboard), his tendency to make pithy statements, and to think two-handedly (tending to alternate chords with virtuosic right-hand runs), as well as the wonderful shiver of his occasional trilled octave chords, is very similar. The playing is often very elegant, swirling round on itself in hundred of miniature arabesques. Though it's a ballad, it's rhythmically sharp: Peacock and Graves, like Mingus and Roach, are a rather provocative rhythm section - very sympathique, absolutely serving the needs of the music and fitting very well with Davidson, but not conventionally subservient or even 'supportive'. Graves in particular keeps up a skittish commentary underneath, rumbling low with toms, prodding with cymbal taps and letting hang the occasionally sustained shimmering wash of sound, Rashied Ali's carpet under Coltrane.

The album makes me feel slightly heady, though not in the sense that a free screech-fest will make the blood rush and heart pound and pulse the neck to spontaneous affirmation; instead, it spiders its way to the throb of body and mind, and even it's most beautiful melodicism (the end of 'Stately 1') is sharp and piquant rather than expansive. Phrased as if each note half-stumbles to the next, splashily tripping a kind of melancholy that's too polite, and too wise, to declare itself as 'blue'. The tender shudder of the 'Dunce', the hand stroked over black and white ivory in compassion. **(Review by David Grundy)**

KEN HYDER'S TALISKER – *DREAMING OF GLENISLA*



Label: Reel Recordings

Release Date: 2007

Tracklist: Dreaming of Glenisla; Diddlin' for the Bairns & Lament for Dairmid; Drum Salute & Lament for Mal Dean; Mrs Macleod Raasay & Soldier's Song; Ca' the Yows; Mngulay Boat Song; Heel an' Toe, Foot an' Moo'; Homeward; He Mandu; That Cu Ban Agaunn; The Black Bear

Personnel: Davie Webster: alto sax; John Rangecroft: tenor sax/clarinet; Lindsay Cooper & Marc Meggido: bass; Ken Hyder: drums

Additional Information: Recorded June 14-15th 1975, Worthing (1-8), and February 24th, 1976, London (9-11).

This is very special: first released in 1975 on Virgin Records, and, after being lovingly remastered from an audiophile vinyl transfer, re-issued by the rather fine Canadian label Reel Recordings, it finds Scottish drummer Ken Hyder fronting what one might call a free jazz quintet in an exploration of traditional Scottish music, and music which displays such influences. In a brief note, Hyder explains that the group arose partly in reaction to the way in which American jazz had so dominated the playing of Scottish musicians that they were overlooking their own heritage. But this wasn't just a sudden burst of reactionary nationalism, for, though the aim was to "get back to these roots, and [to] play off the emotion of Scottish music, that feeling isn't exclusive to the Celtic people. It's there in the blues, in African music, jazz, street funk, and people's music throughout the universe." Hyder's right, of course: on the first piece, the glorious dual lyrical flights of Davie Webster's alto sax, and, in particular, John Rangecroft's clarinet, build to a particularly rousing climax that, while certainly a lot 'folkier' than much British jazz, has definite African-American inflections. After all, I suppose, jazz is as much a 'folk music', an indigenous music as anything else – and free jazz arguably moved it even closer (or back) to these roots: just think of the New Orleans marching-band ethos in Albert Ayler's work.

Maybe I'm just being a sentimental simpleton, a propagandist-softie, but I can't help finding something immensely refreshing about the way in which this group's free jazz doesn't seem so much to be reacting to the various constraints of be- and post-bop (which were, of course, particularly pronounced in the rather conservative British scene), as to be bypassing them entirely, as if that's just the way things are done, as if there is a folk tradition just waiting there to be re-connected with, a 'universal song' of the kind Ayler was talking about.

That just fills me with hope and a sense of possibility; yes, it is easy to sneer at, and yes, of course, it could be the excuse for some rather bad music – particularly of the 'new-age'/'world' variety. But Hyder knows this danger too, when (on his website), he talks about the "upbeat - or happy-milkmaid tastes of World-Music. Or worse, the ironed-out echo-saturated cosmic bliss appetites of the New Age." And his own music challenges both those silly pigeonholes: the music is 'new age' in that maybe it evinces a belief that a new age could be entered, one which doesn't simply wallow in misery and grime and gore, but is built on a changing yet resolved sense of community; and it is 'world' in that it is music made in the world, as all music it is, is open to the sounds coming through the window and heard across the bay and across the ocean, blaring and beseeching over the water and over the mountaintops.

It helps that it's all just so well played. Take, for example, the double (double)-bowed basses of Lindsay Cooper and Marc Meggido, holding drones and imparting a particular kind of 1960s/70s free jazz solemnity over which the saxes can intone and incantate: a prime example is 'Diddlin' for the Bairns & Lament for Dairmid' (one of several tracks in which the band re-interpret traditional pieces). Hyder himself provides an overpowering 'drum salute' which leads onto the wonderfully sonorous, measured mournfulness of the 'Lament for Mal Dean', in which the way the saxophone is played over the drone conjures the effect of a giant jazz bagpipe.

And by no means insignificant is the role of that most ancient medium of human expression: the voice. All five players occasionally add their voices to the collective cauldron, to stirring effect: on 'Diddlin' it sounds almost like Native American chanting, which reminds me of the similar, and extraordinary effects generated by on Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre's 1969 'Humility in the Light of the Creator' by the obscure George Hines. Elsewhere, the celebratory shouts of joy and screams verging on terror enter the collective swarm in a manner that feels entirely appropriate: it is clear that at those moments the players could not do other than give further strength to their instrumental utterances through the rising to sound from lung to throat to air.

As the track titles indicate, there's quite a strong sense of lament and of yearning, as well as of (communal) celebration – but that's only one side of the coin, as whip up to the frenzied celebrations of 'Mrs Macleod Raasay & Soldiers' Song', Davie Webster's 'straight' penny whistle melody already prodded into more adventurous territory by Hyder's relentlessly fast drumming before John Rangecroft roars in truly ecstatic form. While there's a sense of the manic about such sections, more often, the experience is intensely joyful, or intensely mournful, or intensely powerful in some incommunicable mixture of the two (is that not one of the great strengths of both 'folk music' and of 'jazz'?). What I'm trying to say, I think, is that one frequently gets the impression of things being pushed into extremes which seem genuinely risen

from a compulsion to create and express that which must be created and expressed – a compulsion, a necessity. And the reason for this – the reason Talisker's playing feels as deeply felt as it does – is because it is informed by whole worlds of tradition and of communal feeling, not just from Scotland but from America and beyond. 'Dreaming of Glenisla': these 'dreams' are as real as they come.

(Review by David Grundy)

ISOTOPE – *GOLDEN SECTION*

Label: Cuneiform

Tracklist: Illusion, Rangoon Creeper, Atilla, Spanish Sun, Crunch Cake, Mr. M's Picture, Frog, Atilla, Spanish Sun, Lily Kong, Edorian, Golden Section, Illusion

Personnel: Guitar: Gary Boyle, Percussion: Aureo de Souza, Bass: Hugh Hopper, Drums: Nigel Morris, Keyboards: Laurence Scott

Additional Information: Previously unreleased recordings. Tracks 1-6 recorded live in Bremen, 20/5/1975. Tracks 7-8 recorded in NYC, April 1975. Tracks 9-13 recorded in London, 23/7/1974.

I've always been torn on Jazz-Rock Fusion. It has never really quenched my thirst for anything Jazz or Rock. Their fuzzy, futuristic sounding keyboards feel like a sci-fi nerd's fantasy compared to the crisp, cool, and forever swingin' piano styles of people like Duke Ellington and Herbie Hancock. But Herb more than put the funk in Fusion with "Head Hunters." The guitars never did much for me either, but then there's John McLaughlin's work with Miles that never sounded as cheesy or as dated as some of his 80's counterparts. "Golden Section" by Isotope keeps me on the fence about Fusion, but it's got enough to keep me from bailing on it all together.

Again, my biggest beef with this album is the guitar playing of Gary Boyle. It's virtuosic, but he could hardly be more self-centered. Boyle's persistent riffing is quite annoying, and when he gets tired of playing the same line over and over and over again he wails like an under-sexed show-off, which is a real shame because his band is quite good. Laurence Scott, keyboards, shows some killer chops on "Rangoon Creeper" and "Spanish Sun" while Nigel Morris on Drums and Aureo de Souza on Percussion try their best to keep it funky throughout.

Surprisingly though, there's plenty on "Golden Section" to get the mouths of hip-hop heads and beat-diggers watering. "Lily Kong" is one of the best breaks I've heard in a long time. I find it *very* hard to believe (and don't believe it yet) that after some research, it appears to have never been sampled. Hugh Hopper and his fuzz-bass take a very funky walk down the block while Scott drops some tasty Keyboard vamps for us to drool over. This one is just begging to be looped! Although, there aren't any other clean breaks, a savvier producer could have plenty of fun with this album thanks to Morris's and Souza's percussion.

Isotope is a band of talented musicians. Their style of music has never been fully embraced by critics and who knows if it every will be. But at this point I'll respectfully leave them with a firm handshake rather than a "call me later" or the ever-dreaded snub.

(Review by Aaron Hicks)

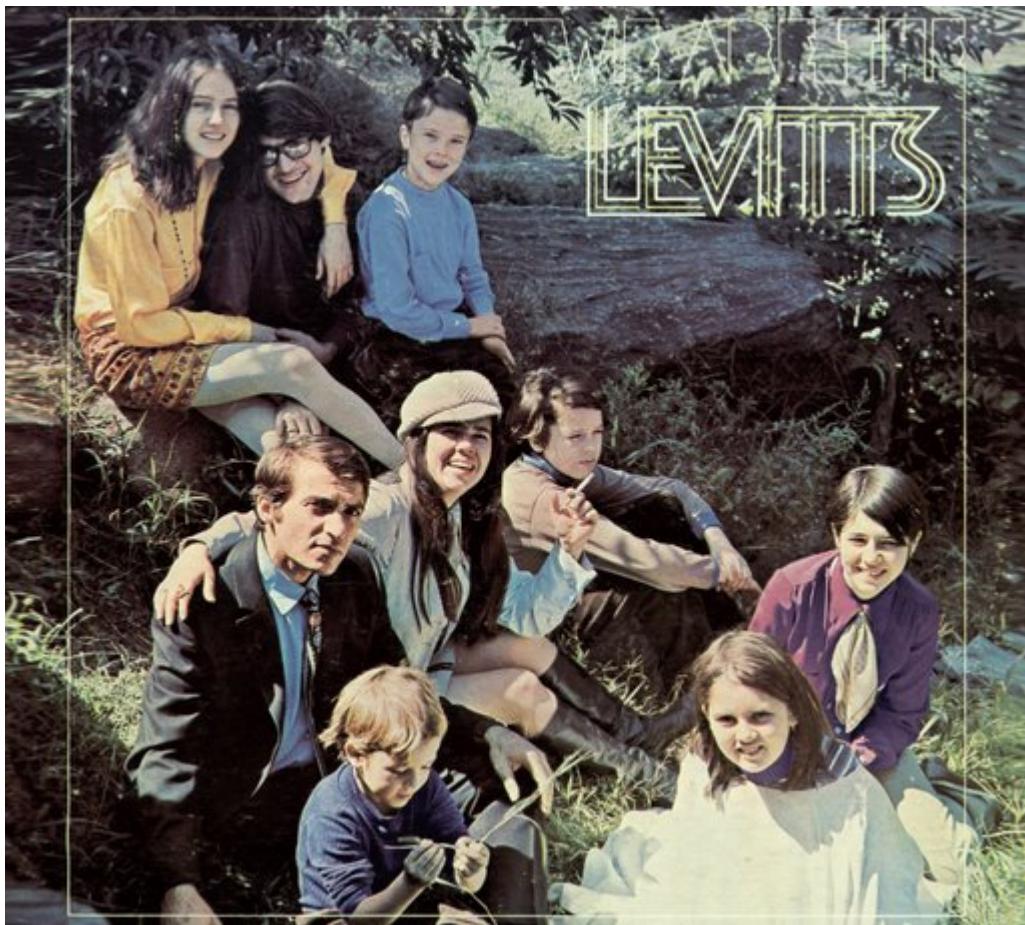
LEVITTS – *WE ARE THE LEVITTS*

Label: ESP-Disk

Release Date: November 2008

Tracklist: The Saints of My City Are Children; Notes So High; Fun City; Then Was Then; Springtime (Primavera); Candy; Once I Had a Little Duck; Departed Hymn; O Amor Em Paz; Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most; We're All Through (Theme Song)

Personnel: Chick Corea: Piano, Cymbals; Don Heller: Vocals; Teddy Kotick: Bass; Bob Leeman: Piano; Al Levitt: Drums; Michele Levitt: Vocals; Minou Levitt: Vocals; Sean Levitt: Guitar; Stella Levitt: Vocals; Teresa Levitt: Vocals; Ronnie Cuber: Baritone Sax; Lou Orensteen: Flute; Larry Provost: Guitar; Eddie Shu: Harmonica; Evaline Steinbock: Cello; Pete Yellin: Flute, Alto Sax



Legend has it that 13-year-old guitarist, Sean Levitt, was auditioning for ESP when he mentioned his family's exceptional musical talent. His 3 sisters and mother, Stella, were wonderful vocalists and Sean's father, Al, had drummed with the likes of Paul Bley, Stan Getz, and Charles Mingus.

So, put the family in the studio with Chick Corea and Toddy Kotick for some biting musicianship. Get a little spice from a Bossa tune by Jobim and Gilberto. And toss in a liberal dose of drug references for an album with more potency, skill, and unity than any recording by the "families" of David Cassidy and Barry Williams. The result: "We are the Levitts."

"Notes So High" is all about the musicians. Pete Yellin with his Alto Sax starts tearing it up from the get-go. Soloing behind and throughout Stella Levitt's singing, he picks off enough of her notes to avoid taking the focus away from her voice. Yellin and Stella drop out after two verses making room for Teddy Kotick to stretch out his fingers on a slightly-swinging bass solo that is quickly overlapped and overtaken by a much more powerful round of improvised notes from Chick Corea on piano. Corea speeds it up and darkens things down to set the mood for Yellin to re-enter and simultaneously solo with Ronnie Cuber on Baritone Sax. The duo swaps notes and swirl around each other in a violent, cyclonic exchange which Al Levitt savagely accents with a hailstorm of drumming acuity. Stella returns to the mix to re-sing the verses from before, but with the musical foray still fresh in their minds everyone's playing is much more dramatic, giving lyrics like "Winter's here/And the womb soon will burst/Winter's here/Little child soon will thirst" a sense of prenatal panic that didn't sound quite as urgent the first time around.

For a less heavy, but nevertheless somber, tune there's "Departed Hymn." During the announcement Robin Levitt obliquely describes it as "a tribute to two brothers;" however, it's worth presuming that the brothers are John and Robert Kennedy considering the proximity of Robert's assassination to the album's release date. Although it isn't a terribly emotionally stirring song because of George Levitt's apathetic recitation of uninspired prose and downright boring musical accompaniment, it is worth a listen to hear the Kennedies reduced to humble, unnamed brothers preaching hope and peace.

From there, the family enters into more psychedelic territory. “The Saints of My City Are Children” talks about “tasting the colors and touching the light” while children search for the “key that opens the door to the sky.” “Fun City” recommends that you “get yourself a token (toke in?) and give your mind a ride” while “Candy” has its share of sugar-coated drug references like “Mmm chocolate drip kiss/Mmm butterscotch bliss/Vanish in the haze/Of Mary Jane days.”

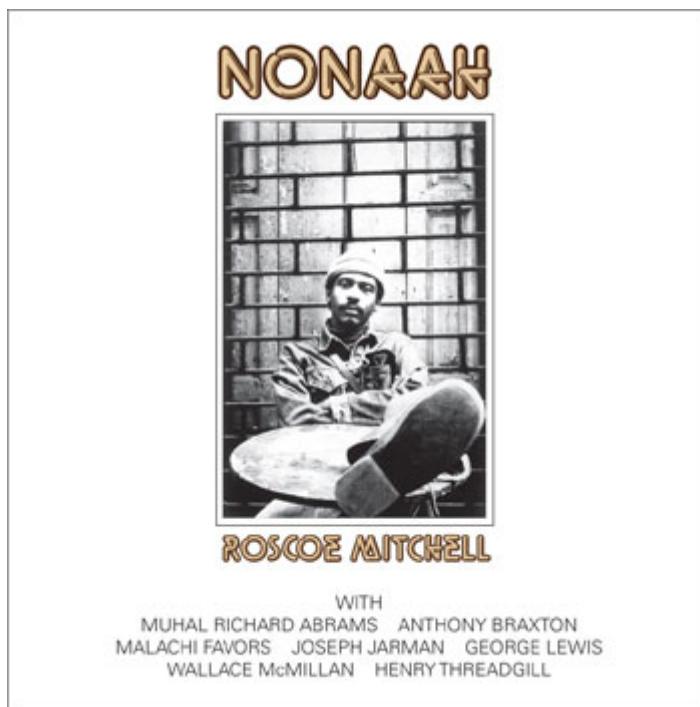
However, the song isn’t only about the family’s favorite muchies; it gives Sean Levitt a chance to show off the guitar chops that scored them a record deal in the first place. He gives a simple, heart-warming solo that’s skillful, but indicative of his youth. And Eddie Shu’s harmonica playing brings to mind scenes straight from an old Western.

“Once I Had a Little Duck” is as endearing as your spouse’s baby pictures. Teresa Levitt, with her 11-year-old voice and her possibly-had-a-few-lessons-but-probably-grew-up-with-a-piano-in-the-house playing style, gets the spotlight for a 37 second song that sounds like a twee-pop outtake from the *Juno* soundtrack. Essentially it is a child singing about a duck, yet it’s always entertaining to hear music that sounds contemporary, but is far from it.

After that small stretch of weirdness, “O Amor em Paz” is a refreshing bit of normalcy. Stella’s voice takes on a surprising sensuality when singing in Portuguese. Who knows whether it’s the proposition of foreign romance or simply a language of tremendous beauty, but she does an exceptional job interpreting this classic by Jobim and Gilberto. Corea puts forth a sweep-you-off-your-feet piano solo with a dancer’s delicacy and the tender touch of true love. Pete Yellin also provides some fluttering flute work giving the song an extra sense of sentimentality.

The Levitts are a very talented musical family. They exist in a world where any style is fair-game and no lyric is too abstract. They are superbly creative with their original material and still very much themselves on standards like “Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most.” Listening to “We Are the Levitts” is like watching a stranger’s home movies: everyone is a part of an obvious whole, but each family member has their own nuance. All of their personalities are right on the surface without any fear of judgment or limitation. This is an unmistakably charming album which stands as an example of why record companies need to reissue any and all unreleased material. (Review by Aaron Hicks)

ROSCOE MITCHELL – NONAAH



Label: Nessa Records

Release Date: September 2008

Tracklist: CD1: Nonaah; Ericka; Nonaah; Off Five Dark Six; A1 TAL 2LA; Tahquemenon.

CD2: Improvisation 1; Ballad; Nonaah; Sing; Improvisation 2; Sing; Chant; Off Five Dark Six.

Personnel: Roscoe Mitchell: alto saxophone; Anthony Braxton: sopranino saxophone; Wallace McMillan: alto saxophone; Henry Threadgill: alto saxophone; Joseph Jarman: alto saxophone; George Lewis: trombone; Muhal Richard Abrams: piano; Malachi Favors: bass.

Additional Information: Recorded 1976-1977 in Willisau, Chicago and Mapenzi.

This marks a welcome return to the catalogue of what might be called an AACM classic. The title, enigmatically, refers not to a fixed composition even in the sense of a written score or a head but, as the liner note tells us, 'not to be regarded as static forms, but as working, evolving structures' and to quote the composer 'when I do it solo I do it many different ways'. The first recorded version was on 'Fanfare for the warriors' by the Art ensemble of Chicago; at the other extreme is a chamber version for flute, bassoon and piano.¹ This of course is all in keeping with the AACM ideal of non-duality between performance and composition.

But it is the opening 'Nonaah' that has given this album much of its fame, or notoriety. The Willisau audience, already annoyed at not seeing Anthony Braxton as advertised, but Roscoe Mitchell as a substitute, voice further discontent as the unaccompanied alto repeats a nine-note phrase over and over, not that the repetition is literal; the long note that ends each phrase is slightly different each time, either in duration, in dynamics or timbre. (The liner note mentions a struggle: to quote Mitchell '...building tensions...and when I did finally release it my alto had just given in to me (it said "OK you can play me now")'). Around the 5.30 mark this difference becomes more marked with extreme timbral distortions caused by singing thru the horn, and probably holding the bell close to the microphone, blending with microtones and increased fragmentation to suggest more of a resemblance to the staccato interval leaps of the original. By the nine minute mark the dynamic level has dropped and something like a slow movement, still on the staccato side, begins. Before too long this builds into a call and response pattern with phrases in the upper register being echoed non-literally in the lower register. Around the 13.25 mark this comes to an abrupt end. The volume rises again, and stays loud. The prevailing language from now on is wide interval leaps, staccato phrasing, a shifting pulse and an array of extended techniques that has almost certainly influenced later saxophonists of the 'paint-peeling' school like Jeffrey Morgan or Mats Gustafsson. A pause about two minutes before the end elicits applause; the heckling of course has ended. After this more legato, if not jazzy, lines take it to the end, and the audience's accolade.

Space and the reader's patience would prevent me from giving this kind of attention to every track, but this is the longest on the album, and I hope you have some idea by now what kind of *tour de force* it is.

After a relatively straight-ahead (or at least free jazz) version of Joseph Jarman's 'Ericka' there's a short reprise of 'Nonaah', possibly even more intense than what went before.

The rest of the set comes from 1977, and it's worth comparing a totally different version of 'Nonaah' by an alto saxophone quartet in which Mitchell is joined by Joseph Jarman, Wallace McMillan and Henry Threadgill, all on alto. Again a slow middle part is sandwiched between two faster movements, but, while a sophisticated sense of form is at work here, the thematic developments and recapitulations associated with classical sonata form should not be expected. It opens with a fortissimo contrapuntal passage lasting about four minutes, in its ostinato repetition with slight variations maybe reminiscent of 'minimalists' like Steve Reich (I prefer the French term *la musique répétitive*), but without any trappings of 'new age' or trance music. The slower part that follows also has a fixed pulse and consists of short phrases with plenty of space between them, with the horns coming together now and then to produce shifting harmonies, or dissonances. It ends with another fortissimo passage, more like a hocket in the strict sense than the opening movement, bearing a recognizable resemblance to the original art ensemble 'Nonaah'. The staccato attack becomes gradually more legato, the single-note phrases become looser and before long there is mayhem of the kind even WSQ in their wild early days never quite achieved. Startlingly original.

The other pieces for more than one musician are all briefer. 'Off five dark six' is played as a duo with Anthony Braxton's sopranino. The opening thematic material is based on very short high-pitched notes, sometimes sounded in pairs, always with space surrounding them. (These polarities of sound and space were to be enduring concerns in Mitchell's music.) The liner note is

not quite accurate in stating that here one saxophone is an extension in pitch terms of the other, as the alto can be heard at a few points playing *higher* than the sopranino. The only other recording I know that Braxton and Mitchell did as a duo is a rare LP on Sackville ², not available on CD at the time of writing; this makes the duo on 'Nonaah' a valuable glimpse into the way they interacted.

The solo version of this number shows that it is a more stable compositional form than 'Nonaah', being broadly recognizable. The lack of a second saxophone is compensated by the use of multiphonics (sounding more than one note at a time by unorthodox fingering or embouchure.)

The duo with Malachi Favors brings into the spotlight a duo that received little enough exposure with the Art ensemble. There is a studied avoidance of legato playing; even when Favors picks up the bow, his playing is not continuous, but full of rests.

Something similar could be said for the trio with Muhal Richard Abrams and George Lewis, where all tend to steer clear of *lines*, except for the dotted kind. The interface between composition and improvisation, where one ends and the other begins, as so often in Mitchell's music, remains tantalizing, and inscrutable. Of course these three have returned this century with the more freely improvised 'Streaming' ³ and some acclaimed festival appearances in Europe.

The bonus tracks previously unreleased were recorded at both US sessions on the album, a concert at Berkeley in January 1977 and a studio session the following month. The version of 'Off five dark six' has been discussed already. Listeners to the 'Wildflowers' sessions made at Sam Rivers' loft may recognize 'Chant' here rendered in a much shorter version with variations not really bearing much resemblance to jazz improvisation in the usual sense. Listeners also have a chance to compare studio and live versions of 'Sing', an expedition into timbral distortions. The live version is much more 'in your face' and contains some of the rare passages on this album that might just about be called 'free jazz.' A piece called 'Improvisation 2' contains enough repetition of motivic material to give the impression that it might be pre-composed.

If you have an active interest in the music of the AACM, this recording is an essential statement and example of working methods in the early days of consolidation. If you've been attracted by the Art ensemble of Chicago's work, and would like to check members' work away from the band, this might be a good place to start, bearing in mind that this music can be challenging, but bracing, and ultimately rewarding.

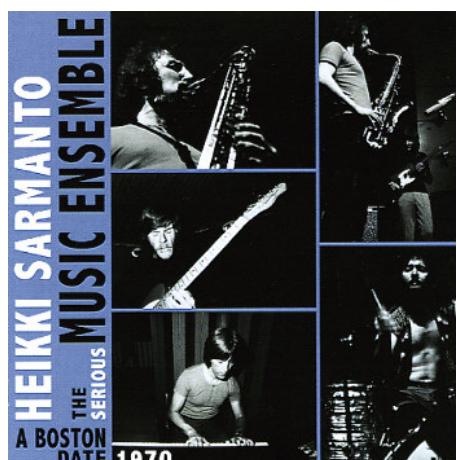
Personally, the more I listen to Roscoe Mitchell's music, the more I'm convinced he is a master musician of a high order.

REFERENCES

- 1 Roscoe Mitchell- Four compositions (*Lovely music* LCD 2021) 1987
- 2 Roscoe Mitchell and Anthony Braxton- Duets (*Sackville* 3016) 1977 (LP only)
- 3 Muhal Richard Abrams, George E. Lewis and Roscoe Mitchell- Streaming (*Pi* 22) 2006

(Review by Sandy Kindness)

HEIKKI SARMANTO/ SERIOUS MUSIC ENSEMBLE – A BOSTON DATE



Label: Porter Records

Release Date: 2008

Tracklist: Top of the Prude; A Different Kind of Smile; Ibiza; Grass Dream; Run; MC

Personnel: Juhani Aaltonen: saxophone; Heikki Sarmanto: piano; Lance Gunderson: guitar; George Mraz: bass; Craig Herndon: drums.

Additional Information: Boston, 1970.

Juhani Aaltonen's saxophone is what really elevates the date, giving a slightly rougher-edged tone that is often seems lacking in the more polished playing of the rest of the group. Nonetheless, there are other, interesting things going on, particular in the interaction between the leader's piano and Lance Gunderson's guitar. It's not the most frequently used instrumental combination, and the players exploit this, the timbral overlap between guitar and the piano's higher range creating some almost shimmering textures which hover between soloistic interplay and more abstract colourism. At these points, the musicians are content to let the music just wander in a less obviously soloistic, purpose-driven way, and that, for me, is more interesting than the solos per se, which probably provide more focus, but also suffer from taking the more predictable route.

Mraz is one of those fine, undersung bass-players, always sure to provide firm support and really shine when asked to – one of those generation of players, Cecil McBee and NHOP included, who really add a melodic freshness, perhaps less woody than Mingus, interested in exploring much higher registers with liberal use of harmonics and arco playing. Drummer Craig Herndon, though he tends to assume much more of a background role, injects some nice tension into the quieter moments with well-placed cymbal blasts and knocks, ensuring that everyone stays on their toes.

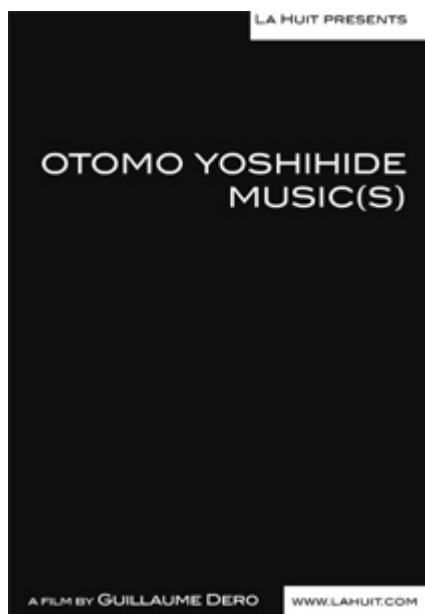
But Aaltonen is the star performer here, imparting a Shepp-like breathiness and burnished, swooning lyricism to 'A Different Kind of Smile' (he's less successful on the other ballad track, disc closer 'MC', where his soprano sax comes near Jan Garbarek's shrill pipiness), and really quite burning flurries on faster numbers – the energy noticeably increases when he begins soloing on 'Top of the Prude', swirls of multiphonic notes breaking up the linear focus for a more directly emotional approach. At times it feels like he's played ahead of himself – as if the emotion of the moment has carried him forward into a place which slightly surprises him, as he draws back into some more jazz-like flurries.

A mention, too, for Saarmanto's compositions – while approaching blandness in the more solemn moments ('A Different Kind of Smile' might suffer without Aaltonen's directness and burr), the knotty, maybe more 'European' sound of a tune like 'Top of the Prude' establishes a nicely energetic, nearly frantic atmosphere for the improvisations to build on. 'I'm Late, I'm Late', Eddie Sauter's Bartok arrangement for Stan Getz on 'Focus', springs to mind.

(Review by David Grundy)

DVD

OTOMO YOSHIHIDE – *MUSIC(S)*



Label: La Huit

Release Date: 2006

Tracklist: DVD 1: Orange was the Color of Her Dress/Tails Out; Turntable; Hat and Beard; Theme from Canary; Eureka. DVD 2: Song for Che; Orange was the Color of Her Derss/Tails out; Soft Stuff; Loud Stuff; Gomen; Misty; Lonely Woman.

Personnel: Otomo Yoshihide: solo guitar and turntable, and with Otomo Yoshihide New Jazz Ensemble (ONJE) - Kenta Tsugami: alto saxophone; Alfred Harth: tenor saxophone, trumpet; Sachiko M: sinewaves; Kumiko Takara: vibraphone; Hiroaki Mizutani: contrabass; Yasuhiro Yoshigaki: drums, trumpet.

Additional Information: DVD 1: Interview and in-concert excerpts; DVD 2: Concerts. Available from lahuit.com (DVD-R, Region-Free).

This double-DVD-R release came out on the Parisian La Huit label a couple of years ago now, but I've only just discovered it, and very fine it is too. These are the same people who put out the recent Wadada Leo Smith Golden Quartet DVD, which I've heard many fine things about, and they clearly know what their doing. Like the Smith disc, this is part of La Huit's 'Freedom Now' series.

The first DVD consists of the film itself: 'Music(s)', directed by Guillaume Dero. This is mostly taken up by performances from Yoshihide's New Jazz Ensemble, recorded in France in 2005, interspersed with interview excerpts and solo performances on guitar and turntable from two different Tokyo concerts, also given in 2005. And the second disc has very much more fine extra footage from the same concerts, adding more than an hour of extra music to the fairly short original running time of 49 minutes.

What I particularly like about this is that the music is very much to the fore, with just the right amount of interview clips to give you something to think about theoretically, to give you some sort of background as to what Yoshihide is out to achieve. This challenges the idea that a 'proper' film (not just a concert document) has to be clipped up short, with talking heads everywhere and the merest snippets of music to illustrate what they are saying. Recent offenders would include Alan Roth's fascinating 'Inside Out in the Open', which yet infuriated because its approach to the subject came across as so scattershot.

So let the pure music flow – and this is well-shot too, camera angles and movement being inventive but not intrusive. There are none of the weird 'psychadelic' visual effects, for example, that mar the recent Soft Machine DVD ('Alive in Paris') or footage of Miles Davis' 70s concerts. And there's rather attractive colour filtering too – almost with a soft focus haze over it, adding a slightly dreamy touch that sits perfectly, for example, with the New Jazz Ensemble's version of Mingus' 'Orange was the Color', all passionate nonchalant saxophones spaced out over Sachiko M's prickly flowing carpet of sinewaves, with guitar strums even adding a touch of surf music, so blissed-out of itself that it survives only as disembodied fragments.

(Review by David Grundy)

BOOKS

HENRY GRIMES – *SIGNS ALONG THE ROAD: POEMS*



Publisher: buddy's knife jazzedition

Publishing Date: 2007

Number of Pages: 129

Contents: signs along the road being put there; the march; easternal mysticism, virtue, and calm; sed; the arch stairwells; the walk in the dark that was heard at night; ortherama the king; of europe; untitled; untitled; the rivers run into the sea; amazed heart, all ponderous eye; the infant of attention; the luckbill; death; ghost and spirit; the place; the world our society, society our world; the chime around above time; lilith; the feeling of ahaz; that was the quip lib; as oceans – head; coasts; at any; a pre-revolutionary cabin; moments; egregious grows the light of dawn; adama and pourquory; hieroglyphics; to adopt a child; grenth; prose lefthand; in the day; the river end; peace; monk music; friend; apologia pro vita sua; water wax; back to down along spring street; in case the place should change; the ground; gage's pick-ups; two; metabites; against the shadow of the moon; a chart of heart a chart of mind; the last chord

Additional Information: Available from <http://buddysknife.de/>

The facts are well known. Henry Grimes, established as absolutely one of the leading figures in the new music of the 1960s, through his work with Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Don Cherry and Pharoah Sanders, disappeared in 1968. Presumed dead ever since, he was discovered in 2003, subsequently remaining in demand around the world, playing with many different groups and in many different contexts, creating anew the wonderment of the 1960s' fervent ferment, with that same energy and ear for the serene howl of uncouth beauty. In the thirty-year gap, he did not touch a bass once. But neither did he suffer from the ills that forced so many jazz musicians off their paths of brilliant creation – drink and drugs. And thus his mind still roamed,

seeking other avenues down which to travel, apart from the music which it sustained and which sustained it. It was to words that he turned, and though Marc Ribot claims in his introduction to this book that Grimes is “a man who almost never speaks,” through writing he was able to exercise his mind, to make that transference from thought to art. Filling thousands of pages with his thoughts, with diary entries and with poetry, he had no audience but himself (how different to the glass-clinking, cash-register-ringing, conversation-ringing atmospheres of the jazz-clubs in which he had played!).

Yet writing with this freedom imposed *more* discipline, not less – one should not expect anything otherwise, given the beautiful freedom of the bass playing. What emerges out of this selection from Grimes’ notebooks is that he was truly was using poetry to *think*, deeply and seriously. As he treated music as a philosophical and spiritual activity, so he understood that poetry can be fundamental to an understanding of where and what one really is. It could be argued that this absolute concentration of faculties emerged from necessity, but it was also self-imposed: no one told Grimes to write, it was his own compulsion to do so. In the thirty silent years during which he remained virtually alone, poetry was a way of reaching deep into his own innermost recesses, but also of engaging with the world from which he had cut himself off – whether this be through the use of history and mythology (‘a pre-revolutionary cabin’, ‘ortherama the king’), religion (‘easternal mysticism, virtue, and calm’) or consideration of the surrounding urban environment (‘the arch stairwells’).

Paradoxically, it may have only been by cutting himself off in this way that he could manage to so deeply engage, with the world and with himself – although it is worth noting that quite a few of these poems were written *after* Grimes’ re-emergence. Nevertheless, it was arguably that extreme cut-off which presented the conditions in which this poetry could be brought into existence (though one must be careful not to romanticise solitude, ‘dropping-out’, as one might be tempted to in the cases of Sonny Simmons, Charles Gayle, or Guiseppi Logan (himself perhaps on the verge of a return)).

Part of the poetry’s beauty is its individuality. Not for the sake of wackiness or trying to seem/appear anything. Compare these lines to your standard jazz poetry: “Distance was spatial/ and the time drew/fathomless,/ in quire to descend/in the mystic measures/overlapping” (‘the walk in the dark that was heard at night’). This is difficult stuff –not just because of the use of obscure words like ‘quire’, ‘mien’ or ‘zygocity,’ but because of the whole construction and content of the poems’ almost every line. Grimes’ phrasing is genuinely knotty; he is genuinely attempting to say things that cannot be said any other way. Prose paraphrase will really not do. Recently I’ve been thinking about how it would be possible to develop a new vocabulary, or set of vocabularies, to deal with the intense demands that music like Grimes’ makes on the traditional resources of music criticism/journalism. I think that ‘Signs along the Road’ is the closest that anyone has so far come to doing this, the trade off being that it is so much a *poetic* conception that I’m not sure it would, or could desirably, be fitted into the confines of criticism.

In any case, music is far from Grimes’ only theme. “Events are the polarizing of urban waves in spiritual displacement”: this is a poetry that addresses that great theme of Frank O’ Hara –the contradictions of living in the modern urban world, and specifically, in the modern American city. Admittedly, Grimes’ methods and results are very different to O’ Hara’s, his city poetry being interior and private-public. By this I mean that the initially inward meditations reach outward to encompass the public (most often in its facade as architecture and constructed living space – hotels, roads, churches, parks) rather than starting out and moving in. This is a more complex process than I allow, in fact, for an observed image tends to be the initial trigger (‘signs along the road’, ‘the arch stairwells’), and the inward/outward relation often exists, as far as that is possible, in a simultaneous relation. Yet still I think there is a difference to O’ Hara’s predominantly social and public-private sphere – by which I mean that even though one is alone, one always writes about one’s friends, about lunches and parties and boat trips and sexual couplings, that even one’s deepest fears are considered in terms of others, and probably could not exist without them (“when anyone reads this but you it begins/to be lost” cements the very personal address of ‘A Letter to Bunny’). Grimes’ scope is both wider and narrower: ‘the world our society, society our world’ – this ‘world’ feels much more abstract than that of O’ Hara, which is constructed almost entirely out of those that people it.

Considering one's environment so deeply inevitably leads one to question how one is placed within it. The poem just cited does this, to be sure, but perhaps the most direct engagement is in 'the place', found on pages 52 and 53. By its final lines ("and i was right: i knew/ just where i was"), one knows without a doubt that the piece's journey is genuine. It begins: "The place was always – a thing/ to wonder, and/ always it seemed like/ it had propensity/ to outright." This seems relatively straightforward, compared to some of Grimes' other contortions of syntax, but read those lines again. "The place was always – a thing/to wonder:" the dash placed between the first four and last two words of the first line, importantly adding an extra dimension of meaning. Not just "the place was always [some]thing/ to wonder [marvel at]", but "the place was always [in existence]," as well as "a thing/to wonder." Why would this be? Because 'place' is not just the realisation of where one is at any one particular moment ('I am standing on Fifth Avenue/ I am standing on 52nd street'), but of where one is *placed* as a human being within the world at large – beyond that, within the cosmos. "Going to the ritual,/ grown in time and beyond the gate...to the indoor place" ('eastern mysticism, virtue, and calm') – this awareness of the very largest context within which one is placed is the very truest way of understanding the very smallest context – one's self, one's body and soul. This mystic background forms an unspoken, but to my mind crucial part of 'the place's argument.

That should not imply any sort of shallow mysticism – rather, much of the poem is concerned with observations of thing seen, with sense-data – "a place, a hotel room... architectural archetype sameness...roadside slides". But these things are always more than single, solid concepts, leading instead to trains of thought and association; in this highly charged context words assume more than themselves, have the ghosts of other words behind them – so that the beautifully assonant "roadside slides" conjures the phrase "roadside dives", and makes one ponder the use of metaphors of movement ('slides', 'dives') to talk of places, buildings which do not move – and this ties back to the road ('roadside'), to the way that cars slide or dive (in rain) along its surface, or that people slide from their cars out to these 'low dives', dive out (while never escaping) the cold comfort, the "couching ambiguity/ of modern life". And then those roads connect to those "signs along the road" which make the subject matter of the titular first poem. Grimes is not necessarily thinking about these connections explicitly – they are not necessarily 'there' in the surface linearity of the poem's observations, but, because of his depth as a thinker and artist, they enter his words anyhow, as if oozing from the fibres of his being.

In the poem discussed above, Grimes notes that "the place has... propensity to outright." One can clearly not take 'outright' as meaning any bald, factual, common-sensical statement. The sense of Grimes' poetry, so much a product of his senses (sensual attune-ment to, at-one-ment with the world), is far from common, if 'common' means 'repeated into triviality'. Yet the humanity it translates to words could, potentially, be common to us all – it's just that there are only some people who are willing to confront themselves and their environment with as much as honesty as to be able to access it.

Based on all this, one should be able to class Grimes, along with Cecil Taylor, as the jazz musician-poet *par excellence* – or, like Taylor, as more than this: as a poet whose conception is undoubtedly musically informed, displaying the same resources, reflexes, turns and emotions as his music-making, but whose writing stands alone, independent of the music. Grimes captures this best himself, in one of the few poems explicitly about music, 'monk music': "Music functions in a pattern./Patterns." That line-broken, end-(full)-stopped ambiguity is something to be savoured, as it teases out this meaning: that music is both patterned and patterning, the patterns created by the musicians in some mysterious way turning round to pattern them. In that sense, Grimes goes some way towards allowing us a glimpse into just what people mean when they talk about the 'magic' of free improvisation – the sense of being both in and out of control, of controlling the music's flow while also not knowing what is going to happen next. Grimes is also saying that music cannot be limited to just one pattern (the full-stop and line-break act as a pause, a hesitation before a correction – "Music functions in a pattern – no, wait, that's not quite right, it functions in *patterns*.") If we apply these insights to the poetry, I think we gain something useful: Grimes' poems use patterns, but not so much the traditional patterns of strict metre and regulated stanzaic shapes, coming nearest to such a tradition only insofar as the 'open field' of Charles Olson hovers somewhere in the structure of 'signs along the road being put

there' (Olson's conception obviously a reaction against those older patterns, anyhow). Instead, these patterns tend, perhaps, to emerge more from a way of thinking and speaking unique to Grimes (just as reading J.H. Prynne's prose helps one understand some of the characteristic twists of phrasing that contribute so much to the strangeness of his poems).

Perhaps they emerge from the patterns of jazz also— the sense of placement and timing in 'monk music' does become a lot more comprehensible if one thinks of Thelonious Monk's playing. This is a poetry with an intensely oral/aural effect (as indicated by the fact that Grimes now recites his words as well as playing bass and violin), but the intricacy of its many effects is very textual – not in terms of numerous allusions requiring hoards of footnotes to decipher (though the range of reference is very wide), but the way in which many of the twists of meaning simply cannot be understood by hearing the poem read aloud – line breaks, punctuation, differing implied emphases which occur simultaneously. It is perhaps for this reason that 'signs along the road' seems to read itself aloud inside one's head as one reads. It's a phenomenon that I don't recall ever happening to me with any other kind of poetry – the voice that plays itself out in my head is not that of Henry Grimes, nor is it mine, and perhaps it is not even fully a voice, but it does exist in some capacity. This sounds fanciful, but one could describe it as the voice of the poem itself, speaking independently of writer and reader but emerging only from the encounter between them. I hope, and I don't think, that such philosophical considerations are something I am imposing on the poetry; rather, they arise from the conditions which it creates – it *makes* one think in this way. It forces one's experience to become enriched, with the gentlest and most studious of touches.

It's a shame that the book doesn't seem to have received much coverage, either from the jazz critics (who might not be quite sure what to make of it), nor from the literary critics (for whom this is off their usual radar – 'what does a free jazz bassist from America have to tell us about poetry?'). There *are* ways of writing about it intelligently, though, as Marc Ribot's introduction shows. Thankfully, he doesn't try to grasp for too many literary parallels – but he does mention Celan, which I think is appropriate, given the stress that both place on individual words and phrases, the way they force language to say things that one almost feels it doesn't want to – the way that their poetry is wrenched into being from the very depths of their self. Such poetry is incredibly honest, and incredibly generous; it is what is meant by being aware, awake, and alive.

(Review by David Grundy)

GIG REVIEWS

- SUN RA ARKESTRA

The Croft, Bristol (November 2008)

- TOOT

The Cube, Bristol (November 2008)

- PARKER/ HAWKINS/ EDWARDS/ MARSH

The Vortex, London (December 2008)

- FLOWER/ CORSANO DUO

The Portland Arms, Cambridge (February 2009)

- MIXED RECEPTIONS

Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (March 2009)

SUN RA ARKESTRA/ SPACEWAYS

The Croft, Bristol. Monday November 10th 2008



THE SUN RA ARKESTRA

Under the direction of Marshall Allen

Marshall Allen (joined 1958): alto sax, flute, EVI / Charles Davis (joined 1955): tenor sax/ Knoel Scott (joined 1979): alto sax, vocals, percussion/ Rey Scott (joined 1988): baritone sax/ Cecil Brooks (joined 1988): trumpet/ Dave Davis (joined 1997): trombone/ Farid Abdul-Bari Barron: keyboard/ Dave Hotep: guitar/ Juni Booth (joined 1967): bass/ Luquman Ali (joined 1964): drums/ Wayne Anthony Smith Jr.: drums/ Elson Nascimento (joined 1988): percussion

Marshall Allen is incredible. The oldest member of the Arkestra, he was nevertheless the only one of the reed section who remained standing throughout; at 85-years old he was clearly a little shaky on his feet, but still willing to execute a little dance during a particularly rocking number. And his saxophone solos were intense, bodily and *loud*. He stood there, knees slightly bent, in his glittering sequined red 'space costume', throwing his fingers on and off the saxophone keys to create extraordinarily visceral bursts of sound, shredding shrawks from his white-heat alto melting the air around and illuminating the cosmic particles dancing within.

Meanwhile, the 'space sounds' of his sparingly-employed EVI (Electronic Valve Instrument) could be said to take the place of Sun Ra's atonal electronic keyboard freakouts. Operating four keys, while twisting a circular dial at the base of the squat black instrument, he moved from floor-shaking low frequencies and swooped to ear-piercing electronic shriek.

And that was only his soloing. Allen is clearly very much the musical director of the Arkestra, though he's not the complete centre of the band in the sense that Sun Ra was. (Saxophonist/vocalist Knoel Scott shouted out the announcements of tune titles and band members). Lifting and raising his hands to cue the band in from massive sound slabs to riffed backgrounds to solos, his role as 'conductor' relied on simple, yet effective gestures, as with Sun Ra himself.

The other musicians were up to the mark too. Charles Davis was the only man on stage who had played with Ra as early as Allen; he seemed subdued in himself, almost withdrawn, but played superbly. Juni Booth plugged away on bass, the instrument's acoustic sound not really favoured by the live sound setup, but heard to good effect for a brief solo on a blues number. Keyboard-player Farid Barron's instrument sounded a little tinny at times, but what he was playing on it was fine enough: what started off as straight blues solos ended up in pounding dissonance, keeping up the stomping beat, and retaining the basic blues harmonic structure, while subverting expectations through dense textures and unexpected chordal juxtapositions. Knoel Scott was the showman of the band; as well as saxophone, he busied himself by pounding hand drums, his lips pursed out, to give added rhythmic impetus, and wailing blues vocals (including Lou Donaldson's 'Whisky-Drinking Woman') alongside the more familiar 'space chants'.

The concert opened and ended with Arkestra members threading their way through the crowd (and having to force their way through the audience in the jammed space of the pub's back-room), singing the jubilant 'We Travel the Spaceways.' In between, there was a wide variety of material, from some crowd-pleasing and infectious, but musically fairly conventional blues numbers, to the familiar space chants ('Rocket Number Nine', 'Space is the Place', etc) and Fletcher Henderson numbers. 'Angels and Demons' at play was cued up in a heavier version than the delicate album version from the 1960s, with Allen reprising his flute solo before wailing out on alto.

With only eleven members (only four of whom are from the original Arkestra – vocalist Art Jenkins was recovering from illness), it's obviously not the same as one of Ra's massive 60s or 70s Arkestras, but they play with soul and guts for double their number. It is of course a show – there were no lights shows, and no dancers, but there were shiny 'space' costumes, singalongs/chants, dramatic dynamic contrasts, and such technical feats as a fluent saxophone duet from a transcription of an improvised John Gilmore solo. Like the original Arkestra, in its various incarnations, this was clearly a tightly-drilled band (perhaps to be expected, given Sun Ra's emphasis on discipline), but one with a fluidity to it that could be very exciting. In fact, for me, the best thing about the evening was the way that everything seemed so loose – Allen would cue the next tune by singing a musical phrase to a band member, sparking half the band to rustle through reams of sheet music to find the right piece as the other musicians launched in; problems with microphones only added to the feeling of improvisational alchemy.

Opening act Spaceways, a Bristol group apparently influenced by Ra, were entertaining enough, doing no more than required – obviously people were waiting for the 'main course'. Some rasping saxophone and Roland-Kirkish flute solos could have gone on for longer, feeling a little bit constrained within the riffing big-band framework, and the electric-bass grooves felt a little nu-jazzy, but it was worth for the final moments of the final tune, 'Cairo', in which the band erupted into a crescendo of ragged vocalisation before a brief burst of ridiculously fast tempo wailing. This was unashamedly playing to the crowd, but it was hard not to get excited by. Meanwhile, the Arkestra's live experience was not just exciting, but intensely joyous and involving. "England is the home of theatre" declaimed a grinning Knoel Scott after the gig, still dressed in his space regalia, and brandishing a gold 'Egyptian staff' which appeared more than a little out of place on the greyness of a Bristol street.

Jazz journalists, in their typically snooty way, would have us believe that the whole space trappings were a load of nonsense, and get in the way of the music, but this gig showed how much they part of the whole experience. 'Great black music, ancient to the future', couldn't be a better tag, even if Sun Ra didn't think of it himself. I'd rather Ra's outer space 'gobbledegook' than whatever po-faced dullard piano trio gets the seal of approval these days. Space is still very much the place.

TOOT (Dorner/Lehn/Minton)
The Cube, Bristol, The Cube, Bristol, 28/11/2008

This, one of the gigs in a five-date UK tour to celebrate the 10th anniversary of this fine trio, was a lesson in how to improvise well. As Toot told us that night, through their music, it's about control, about not going for the climax (that comes, but it comes naturally and thus feels like the result of an actual journey, not just something you think you have to put in there because it will make the punters happy or will make you happy, or both), and above all about letting the sounds be sounds. That sounds mystical, Toot is far from mystical, but there is a patience to it, and that in fact takes great skill – just to concentrate on one sound, or one set of sounds, for a minute or more. And that concentration, demanded of audience too, and so hard for the players sitting there in front – perhaps harder with a big audience, so the Cube's tiny crowd could get drawn in: witness the one-minute silence at the end, staring at the purple-red lightshow on the floor.

Dorner, purple-suited, immobile on the left, his concentration, staring ahead, sliding valve on the trumpet or just blowing in, adjusting amplifier controls on his left (though apparently the sounds he made were all acoustic). Lehn in the middle, black T-shirt, glasses, no shoes, foot on pedal, his analogue synth enclosed in some sort of carry-case which obscured one's vision of what exactly he was doing, and gave it that much more of an alchemical feel: he seemed to discover the sounds as he went along (though of course he knows the instrument inside out), hands flicking on and off, as loudness built at certain points slapping the side with his hand, twitching energised wired. Minton, on the left, was just as animated (as is his wont), his mode of producing sound unutterably tied to the theatrics of his posture, as he possesses the sounds or they possess him, flopping his hand, wrinkling his nose and emitting high bird-whistles, a baby's cry, a herd of frustrated improvising hippos.

We have much to learn from people like these, in their very different approaches, about control, discipline, humility, sensitivity. It is in the making of the thing the thing exists at all.

EVAN PARKER/ ALEXANDER HAWKINS/ JOHN EDWARDS/ TONY MARSH
The Vortex, London, 18th December 2008.

First Set: Band straight in, Parker's tenor blowing down hard low honks following highflung cries. Straight away I notice the visual aspect of Marsh's drumming (which is very much connected to how it sounds): eyes closed, head moving, wired to the music's mainframe, his whole body rhythmic – quite a contrast to the virtual immobility of Tony Oxley, where only the hands flash out from left to right in furious motion. Marsh's playing tonight has a hardness to it, like Parker's: this is a *hard* set, not so much in that it's 'difficult' music (of course it is that, but it's by no means the *most* intellectually ramped-up free improvisation I've heard), more in the sense of sheer solid impact, steely momentum. Hawkins is for the most part Parker's shadow, laying down chords, playing a certain figure which he keeps referring to, as if it's something he just can't get out of his head and which keeps running out from under his fingers, almost beyond his control. Occasionally he breaks out for brilliant flashes high up the keyboard, quickly scampering back down to return to the middle register. Parker is clearly the dominant force in the group, at this early stage, the 'lead voice' – perhaps down to the acoustics of the room and of the microphones as much as to anything else – and perhaps that's why he takes a breather, sensing a certain endangering of the collective, contributory group dynamic. And so we get Hawkins solo, high register crabhand scuttlings and then a little delicate wave in to John Edwards, whose breath you hear breathed in rhythm to his playing. It goes quiet, then a sudden sound like a ropesnap; Parker smiles wisely into his beard, and the solo ends hard.

Applause and Parker comes back in, mysterioso now. Edwards and Marsh hit/pluck the rhythm – for under it all there is a rhythm, but it's one of swaying and evasion rather than of strict timekeeping, and indeed, now I think about, it's to be found Parker's playing almost more than in that of the 'rhythm instruments.' Hawkins is locked into a particular split up-roll, the effect at once jerky and flowing, as near-mellifluous phrases are jaggedly juxtaposed, spliced-up and made to leap on their toes. Now mysterious, more delicate, less broken; Hawkins is playing

single lines more than chords at this stage, freed up, perhaps, from the accompanying and shading role he played at the start, limbered up to interact in quick linear flashes. He and Parker come closer and closer in their interaction, not from echo or imitation but from independent parallel trajectories – the lines converge and briefly they're locked into a melody, could get ready to ride it over the rhythm but no – it cuts off and the momentum's still there, the joining moment forgotten as musical data keeps punching on and out and all around.

Suddenly you're aware that such a buzz of *energy* is being generated – headshaking, floorshaking – but that this has happened incrementally, evolved in such a way that the process is felt not thought, so that at one moment one's aware of the 'misterioso' passage and at the next things have hotted up by quite a few degrees. Like those moments of sleep when one nods off without realising it, that disjunct in time. What happened? What did I miss? Was I asleep hours or minutes or even just seconds? Except in this case almost the opposite has happened – one's become so sucked into the music that the effect reached is maybe close to sleep – some kind of trance, of concentration so high and so focussed that it becomes the full force of thought and cannot be viewed 'from the outside' as some process happening to myself, but is a process simply filling the whole field of the mind for however long it lasts. And then you just snap out of that, and the point of the music is vibratory to a deeper pulse hitting hard, in the gut, such force that these acoustic instruments come near to an amped-up, cranked-up electric guitar – a near-simultaneous Parker tenor scream with a particularly vicious Marsh cymbal hit make the two very different instruments (sax and drums) sound almost as one. Parker's eyes are closed, his face always with a slightly red flush to offset the white beard, but with that characteristic refusal to leap into acrobatics or callisthenics indicative of the great effort he's making. The other three, though, clearly indicate that this is a music which involves immense physicality: Edwards gnat twitching up and down and back to *move* music out of his bass, to force its sound out as movement, Marsh's circling head, Hawkins' hands *bouncing* up and down on the piano keys, shifting round on the piano stool like Cecil Taylor.

Things have turned into a circling near-nightmare, Parker's Coltrane upshrieks crying some sort of pain: these men have something to say and saying it is what makes it exist. The saying and what's said are the same. And if that might even be malicious – Parker's tenor bark and a flicker of snarl as he thrusts up notes into the air – then that's in it too; is not beauty fraught and the violence done to it makes it what it is? It makes me twitch all over – so it makes you know the truth of what Cardew says in 'Towards an Ethic of Improvisation' – you do have to be there, in that room and at that time, it is in the moment the music makes itself and makes the moment, recordings are the after-image, the ghost, the not-quite-presence of what's gone. You knew you 'get it' when you hear the recordings, but you know you don't really – not quite, not quite this – and in front of it, in front of the performance, it's harder to look away or drift off, and *you* are now the one put under the microscope: *the musicians have become your critics*, when you thought you were the one going in safely to watch their exhibit from your nicely candle-lit table.

'Modern jazz' turns up as someone's (burning) old hat, tossed on the piano, onto the bass, tangled up in gut strings, stretched on a snare and beaten until all that's left is shredded in the bell of the saxophone, to be sent off back to the jazz police. A drum 'solo' slams out scattered gunshots, with purpose – and Edwards is buzzing, his eyes closing up and his mouth hanging slightly open. Even Marsh's never-changing face is shaded by something of destructive elfish glee. Once more I notice the way that the sounds he makes are the audible manifestations of his physical movements: that he really strikes and hits his kit, sticks his sticks to it, that most basic instinct of the child to *hit* things *hard*, with wicked joy. Still I'm a little uneasy with the continuing sense that Parker is the 'leader' (he earned it, *ne c'est-pas?*), and that he's almost too much a motor – wind him and he's off whatever Hawkins happens to scrabble underneath the crests of his saxophone waves.

From what Hawkins is scrabbling it's clear that the piano player's getting more and more into his 'own territory' – not that he's just 'doing his own thing' regardless, but that he's in a place where his playing emerges out of his genuine creative intelligence and to the height of his capabilities rather than anxiously shading what the 'living legend' might choose to play. Boxy but delirious chords, then under the lightglare sweaty hands slide up the keyboard sideways: like

shunting a truck, pushing hard, the same desire to beat and to force the instrument to break point as Marsh. And from that extreme to some very jazzy phrasing, strongly reminiscent of McCoy Tyner, so that for a moment the group sounds like the Coltrane Quartet without Elvin Jones (Marsh is too much into his own thing to toss off any Elvin Jones polyrhythms). Given Parker's increasing Coltrane influence that's not too much of a surprise, but the level of explicitness is still somewhat unexpected – not that that's a bad thing, in the small and surprising dose to which we're treated here. And those Tyner-esque stacked fourths are wonderfully chunky and less rhythmically stolid than McCoy's tended to be. Piano phrases keep dancing round 'A Love Supreme' – the 1965 live version, not the tamer studio recording – and it's that 1965 period I keep hearing in Parker's playing. All this is very nice but risks a loss of interest if it carries on too long and becomes default mode – and of course that won't happen.

Dimming sax, bowed bass, trembling bass; just a trio now, minimal drums and piano, frightened lyric from bass, saw-song-sound. This never feels like an obviously signposted transition, though transition was what was needed – it wasn't as if Edwards decided 'I'll go for the bow now because we need a change' but that it emerged from what went before as unforced necessity. Up to this point Hawkins has tended to absorb Parker's style of phrasing, but now he trusts his own – shivery chords and shrill, speed-freak runs – no temptation for the rhythmic regularity of Tyner-esque left-hand chord-comping, not really too much Cecil in there, despite the Cecil-style licks and runs, but a distinctive stream of melody flowing over the whole keyboard, barely room for any pauses at all. I say that, but yet it also feels like some odd cutup of Tyner and Cecil – the two particularly obvious influences that night – simultaneously channelling their spirits through his fingers – and that's the first time I've heard that combination. But, again, as with Edwards, it doesn't come from a too-obvious desire: it's not 'I know, let's jumble McCoy's fourths with Cecil's arpeggiated runs' – it comes from, in, and of, the moment, that mysterious interface between intention and whatever occurs, seemingly outside the bounds of intention, at that particular point. Yes, 'channelling' would be the appropriate metaphor – diverting off the main river – or rather, the opposite of what that implies – the McCoy/Cecil 'channels' flow into the Hawkins 'river', the keyboard-stream. And it strikes me that that's just a superb example of how 'influence' works its way into one's playing, of the vacuum-less-ness of music. This has philosophical implications: all these things, these influences, are there as *potential*, always – does that mean that, always, they somehow both are (they exist) and are not (they do not exist)? Maybe I need to brush up on my phenomenology...

As Parker comes back in, hacking sound from the shadows, a more febrile touch displaced by lowhorn spasms, you can *feel* Hawkins' sound even if it's not heard, hands in constant, blurred tremble-chords, left hand in violent low-down hits then high-up runs, sliding glisses with the back of the hand. His physical study of Cecil is really evident in his playing, more so than when I last saw him perform (reviewed in the previous issue of 'eartrip') – so that, for instance, chords are played with the *palm* of the hands rather than with the fingers, for added force – and music that strong has to end, can only be sustained so long (though of course Cecil stretches that out beyond the limits of what seems to most people to be the possible).

Parker's knack for an ending comes into play – for sensing that perfect moment when everything *should* just stop, even then it *could* carry on – and things end with what seems like a bang, though in reality things had quieted for a few seconds. But the 'bang' is what is felt, and I realise that what happens and what is heard – or, I should say, what is *experienced*, in the totality of action and audibility – are two different things, in a way that I can't understand, but which might teach us something rather interesting about the way the brain functions. And I say 'Parker's knack for an ending', but that knack does seem also to be independent of the musicians themselves – or, let's say, almost beyond their control. When you have that heightened group experience it just gets to that point where things happen of their own accord and the music itself *lives*. If, for Adorno, "Works of art do not say what their words say," then in this case the work of art says more than the musicians play. Not in the way that Adorno means – not as sedimented historical knowledge – but as something altogether more mysterious. Even the pragmatic Derek Bailey ended up talking about the 'magic' of group improvisation, and, until we can find a way of 'objectively' analysing the complexity of these phenomena which manifest themselves in

musical performances of this kind – and I’m not at all certain that’s even desirable, or gets the terms of the argument right – that’s what we critics will have to do too.

FLOWER/ CORSANO DUO

The Portland Arms, Cambridge, Tuesday 17th February 2009



According to Nietzsche, we are "fools for rhythm." Is that such a bad thing? The Flower-Corsano Duo are all about that relentless rhythmic surge, that urge to pound and *strike* a drum-kit until it gives off a million sharded beams of hard light, a near-mystical beam with an aura enhanced by twanging plucked scales. It's a beam that emerges with such clarity only out of a sheer single-mindedness, as opposed to diffuse hippy mysticism, messing around with weirdness. These guys know what they are doing, and do it – they go straight for the peaks, even if, on this occasion, it took a while to get going (this was by no means the best Flower-Corsano performance I've heard).

I hate to say it, but it's hard not to avoid terminology like 'consciousness altering'. This music offers an alternative of some sort, to the packaged and the satisfied. In its desire to always maintain that state of yearning on which its power to move the body and mind is based, this music refuses a satisfaction and a comfort with 'how things are' – the desire to prolong that sheer enhanced experience is inherently a desire that acts against the diurnal jackboot tread, or what poet Sean Bonney calls "that shameful but essentially boring public murder." And yet I'd hesitate to make this too political – not only because I know nothing of Chris Corsano and Mike Flower's political views, but because what they create too is a commodity, aimed at a particular crowd. They provide a vaguely 'spiritual' experience for an 'experimental' scene which doesn't believe in the spiritual but wants to get those same kicks in a 'justified' left-field setting.

That's the too-cynical reduction; swing to the other extreme, and they offer a hope of some sort, or a burning desire; or, hell, I like it anyway, even if its 'spirituality' is actually just constant rise to climax (masturbatory or coupling, take your pick), even if all it is is repetition to orgasm and serene aftermath of that jerking trance.

And fuck the sexual analogies, it must be said that Corsano is an excellent drummer. Some drummers play something for a while, then stop and move on because it's too much effort, but he can stay in the zone, in the pocket, stopping only when the music dictates a new tack; his arms moving at pummelling speed, his dexterity is that of a boxer as he consistently rains down blows on his kit, plays very loud and very fast. It's not polyrhythmic complexity so much as single-minded determination and drive, building to the inexorable bodily mysticism that the duo pull off so well: a hard-hitting prayer, a religious punch to the gut.

The structure is not so much about note choice but about the creation of a continuous sound stream which retains its interest through a control of dynamics which is actually quite subtle. Ebb and flow, ebb and flow. Both Corsano and Flower vary the loudness in a manner that could be quite instructive for certain bands 'on the scene'. Flower's 'Japan Banjo' is laid horizontal on an ironing board, of all things; his somewhat decrepit face hidden by straggly hair,

his jeans legs kicking it to ecstasy shudder, his quivering body and bobbing head in electric shock at the electricity of his performance and of his own electric instrument.

The sincerity embodied in that drugged-up trance (where music is, as far as I can tell, the only drug, at that particular point in time) – that sincerity is a belief in sound or 'vibrations' as Albert Ayler would have it. And that doesn't seem like a hippy catchword when one senses the drum-pound tremble the floor slightly, undulation/ underlation, over and over, constant motion. It's waves, ebbs and flows; it's mostly that inexorable rhythm lull, some ex-hippy's eastern-tinged vision in a temple where they all take pot; though it emerges from and back into drone sunrises, a sitar-sounding drone which must have been playing throughout the performance but which one only notices when Corsano calls it a day and Flower switches off his amp.

Such a matter-of-fact conclusion indicates that, for all one might talk about the 'spirituality' of the Flower/ Corsano experience, in reality what happens is that one is shuddered into an instructive awareness of one's own body, an awareness that might make one value the unclean thing, rather than evading it in a quest for clean perfection. This is a messy mysticism, the dirtied but still utterly valuable legacy of some kind of psychedelic hippiedom that never really existed in the 60s when that sort of thing was most conceivable; but it exists now, beats into broken dreams its brilliancy.

MIXED RECEPTIONS [Kettle's Yard New Music Mornings] Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, Sunday 15th March 2009

"Featuring works for radio reception and transmission, with pioneering works by Cage alongside new composition and site-specific soundworks from artists in Cambridge and beyond." Thinking outside the box, this sort of programming, and all the better for it. What was so refreshing about the concert was its lack of boundaries. Yes, that phrase and its attendant concept is so often paid lip or pen service to when really nothing of the sort occurs; rather, the uneasy forcing together of two seemingly opposed strains only serves to reinforce that opposition and ensure that a real understanding is forever forestalled for the glittering surfaces of actual bad construction. But here there seemed a more genuine openness, if I can say that with any certainty.

Cage provided the supposedly 'classical' element to the programming, allowing it to be classed as officially-viable 'new music', to hang in the air around the surrounding 'serious art-works' by the likes of Ben Nicholson and Gaudier-Breszka, while really opening up a far less officially-defined (and constricted?) space. For the Cage pieces performed were the 1956 'Radio Music' and 'Variations IV', which was not performed in a self-contained manner, but swarmed outwards to occupy the entire concert-ritual-process. At least, I think that's what was supposed to be happening: the programme notes were a little unclear as to how exactly the 'Variations' were realized: "Today's performance encompasses the whole running time of the concert and shorter performances," one reads, yet this seems to cross over with the 'experimental PA' performance by Jo Brook, entitled 'Local Radio', in which she moved around the space with a portable PA, setting off various streams of microphone feedback or radio static. Not so much because of this uncertainty – after all, it becomes somewhat absurd when one begins to debate whether random radio noise is the 'work' of John Cage or of another performer – but because of the somewhat frustrating character of the perambulatory acoustic element itself, this felt like the least successful part of the concert; as Brook prowled the area dangling various microphones in the air or on upper gallery walls, she seemed oblivious to the musicians' intensely focussed activities, her drifting presence an all-too distracting visual element which could have prevented the tightly concentrated listening which the music demanded.

But that may be to quibble – and if experimentation causes an artist's spoken introductions to his songs to compete with feedback, perhaps it's not too high a price to pay. One must not forget, either, Brook's role in putting together this concert: as a member of LEAP (Live Experimental Arts Performance Society), the curators of this particular occasion, she's providing a valuable service to the Cambridge community, too often starved of opportunities and audiences for new and innovative musics.

To unfold the events in order: the Cage radio piece began proceedings, assembled participants intently squinting at (presumably) copies of the score in front of them, its detailed instructions nonetheless completely open to the whim of chance at the same time. Listening to the sounds produced, it was hard not to think of what has come since – industrial and noise music for one – and it was hard not to wonder if this had influenced the supposedly influenceless sound for which Cage was aiming. Nonetheless, it was hardly ‘Cage Redux’, and it’s hard to know quite how the piece could have been realised any better.

Stepping out of the radio ensemble, Cambridge fingerpicking guitarist C. Joynes was then given a brief showcase. Introducing four selections, he sketched out the way in which his wide listening history has influenced the more overtly folky sound of his playing. Thus, a ‘prepared guitar’ piece (well, one object shoved between the strings, as opposed to the abundance of Keith Rowe’s set-up) brought out not only the influence of John Cage’s prepared piano works but of the similarities in timbre between the heavy thumb attack of finger-picking and the timbres found in certain sub-Saharan instruments. Shot through all this was a clear love of melody and line – even though line would periodically be obscured by ringing harmonics, it would always re-assert itself with added force when it next poked up its head – legitimising Joyne’s claim that he is a ‘folk musician’ influenced by the avant-garde, rather than vice-versa. Not quite ‘free folk’ then, but an intriguing mixture of the two which also carries on over into the American jazz tradition: firstly, a piece inspired by the likes of Ornette Coleman and Alice Coltrane, all solemn sonorities, for which Joynes was joined by bowed cello, and, to conclude, a version of ‘Autumn Leaves’ which took only the chord changes as its basis, dispensing with the melody in favour of more abstract explorations. At times phrases which might have come from a sweet jazz cover of the tune entwined themselves round the often unresolving chords around, and the feel was oddly like the Derek Bailey of the Joseph Holbrooke Trio, as documented on the rehearsal recording of Coltrane’s ‘Impressions’, in which an extremely odd balance between jazz and free improvisation emerges.

A lot of ground covered in barely twenty minutes then, and more still to be traversed as Joynes made way for a freely improvising duo. Cos Chapman’s duet with an un-named cellist, a series of short improvised pieces, represented the first time these two performers had even played together, let alone in front of an audience, but the collaboration seems likely to yield future rewards, if continued. Chapman’s loops of thudding guitar runs found their equivalent in scrabbling and vicious cello, while at other times he treated his guitar strings with various metallic implements (including a saw) and e-bow, to produce more sweeping (occasionally shrieking) high resonances, again matched by scrape-bowed cello harmonics. The use of electronic attachments by both artists undoubtedly expanded the sonic palette (though their use on the cello was very subtle, perhaps hard to hear at all if one did not realise that various pedals were being used), and the intensity of scuttling scattering, *forceful* notes briefly summoned up a whirlpool effect, sucking into its unstoppable rush and momentum – particularly as Chapman’s guitar and electric bass loops built up and on in the final piece. The performance did feel as if it could have benefited from a longer time-frame – although, given the amount that was fitted into one hour, such constraint is understandable, the sudden endings were nonetheless still a little unsatisfactory. But in the spirit of experimentation and discovery, this was a first-rate set of improvised music.

(All Gig Reviews by David Grundy)

List of Contributors

Aaron Hicks makes his reviewing debut for ‘eartrip’ in this issue.

Stef Gijssels can still be found at ‘Stef’s Free Jazz reviews’ (<http://stefffreejazz.blogspot.com>), from where his contributions to ‘eartrip’ are taken.

David Grundy studies English at Cambridge University (not for much longer!)

Sandy Kindness is a musician. Among other improvisational activities, he is a member of I-C-E (the Improvising Clarinet Ensemble) and the trio Kindness/May/Lash.

Ian Thumwood is an amateur pianist with an extensive knowledge of the history and practise of jazz. His other enthusiasms include football and birdwatching.

Mark Anthony Whiteford, a saxophonist, has been involved in improvised music in the Bristol area for a number of years.

Musicians and Groups Featured on ‘sound journey’

Ilia Belorukov is a saxophonist and flautist from Saint-Petersburg, Russia, working in the realms of free improvisation, free-jazz, noise and electroacoustic music. Many of his recordings, solo and as a member of the Totalitarian Musical Sect (TMS), Dots & Lines, DaDazu & Wozzeck, are freely available online. <http://www.myspace.com/belorukov>

The Cambridge Free Improvisation Society (CFIS) is a collective of freely improvising musicians (mainly students at Cambridge University) who have been meeting for private sessions and concert performances during the past three years. Recordings of most sessions are available at <http://cambridgeimprovisation.wordpress.com>.

Stuart Chalmers (Skarabee) works with guitar loops/ electronics/ preparations/ glockenspiel/ kalimba/ sansula to create hesitant, delicate improvised soundscapes. Having become involved with the Bristol free improvisation scene, he is now based in Warwick. The EP ‘Guitar Works’ 1 is available for download from <http://www.ivo-multimedia.com/mp3/skarabee/guitar%20works%201/>.

David Curington plays oboe, cor-anglais, and piano. As an undergraduate, he has been active on the Cambridge music scene, and a number of his compositions have been performed in concerts there. His website is <http://www.davidcurington.com/>

Alexander Hawkins is emerging as one of the most interesting young pianists in the UK jazz and free improvisation scene. Highlights of his career so far include recordings with the groups Barkingside and The Convergence Quartet, performances with Evan Parker and Lol Coxhill, and continuing involvement in the Oxford Improvisers. www.alexanderhawkins.com

I-C-E (Improvising Clarinet Ensemble) is a quintet of London-based improvisers (Sandy Kindness, Noel Taylor, Jerry Wigens, Tara Stuckley, and Rick Jensen), originally deriving from the improbable number of clarinet players who attend Eddie Prevost’s workshop at the Welsh Chapel, Southwark, London. All of its members are active with other bands and projects within the London improvisation scene. <http://www.myspace.com/icesounds>

Dominic Lash is one of the busiest bass on the improv scene, in the UK and beyond. Recent highlights include playing with Tony Conrad, touring with Steve Reid, and an ensemble performance of the composition/ improvisation ‘Representations’ at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. <http://www.dominiclash.co.uk>

Styles J. Kauphmann is a clarinettist, vocalist and violinist. Since 2006, he has performed a series of solo ‘acoustic improvisations’ in, among other places, Cambridge, Oxford, London and

Norwich. The series comes to an end with a concert in Berlin in May 2009. More information is provided at: <http://stylesjkauphmann.org>

Stet Lab is a monthly series of improvisational experimentation taking place in Cork, Ireland, curated by Han-Earl Park. Visiting musicians have included saxophonists Bruce Coates and Paul Dunmall, pianist Mike Hurley, and drummer Mark Sanders. <http://www.busterandfriends.com/stet>

Graham Mackeachan is a bass-player who has been involved in the Bristol improvised scene and now lives in London. More solo material can be heard at <http://2009solos.multiply.com>

Mark Anthony Whiteford, who also writes for this magazine, has been part of the Bristol free improvisation scene for a number of years. He has recently initiated the '2009 solos project', which can be found at <http://2009solos.multiply.com>

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